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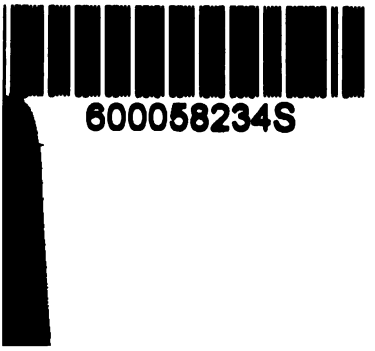
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VOL. II.

London:
T. CAUTLEY NEWBY, PUBLISHER,
30, WELBECK STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE.
1863.

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250. s. 82.


BIBLIOTHECA · BODLEIANA

AFTER LONG YEARS.

CHAPTER I.

LEAH AND HER MASTER.

Not as the poor trembling wife had done in the morning, not as a culprit seeking the stern face of his judge, did Leah Ash go down now, as she was bidden, into the presence of her master. She felt indeed tolerably sure that she was wanted for something which he, at least, deemed of more importance than the temporary illness of his wife—perhaps her guess went even further than this—and the messenger had told her, as they descended the

stairs together, that Mr. Leonard appeared in one of his "awfullest rages."

Yet, notwithstanding all this, the housekeeper's step was firm, and her aspect untroubled, as she knocked at the library door and heard a voice that was evidently not under its owner's control desiring her to enter.

"I am here, sir," said Leah, in her own clear, ringing tones, as Frederick, for a moment after she was within the room, kept his eyes bent upon a book he was feigning to be reading.

He got up then without looking at the speaker, walked quickly to the door, turned the key in the lock, and came back to the chair he had previously occupied, his servant still standing in an attitude of very proper respect before him.

Whatever might be the matter he was intending to discuss, Mr. Frederick Leonard looked, on this occasion, excessively in earnest, not exactly in a rage, as Leah's mes-

senger had ignorantly reported of him, but as if under the influence of very strong and painful excitement, which, for some reason or other, he deemed it expedient, as much as possible, to conceal.

At length he began—not addressing his calm listener by any name—

"I am given to understand that you made that stuff, that jelly which Miss Clare has been taking for her cold during the last two days. Are you aware that each time, after eating the smallest portion of it, she has been ill, very ill, and that her sister and some of the other ladies in the house are suspicious of it?"

As he paused here, waiting for an answer, and keeping his eyes fixed on his companion's face—a face never more passionless and statue-like than at the present moment, Leah said gently—

"I hear it now, sir, for the first time. I made the jelly from a very simple recipe with which Mrs. Leonard, my mistress, furnished

me. I believe Miss Frances Clare was ill before she took any of it."

"Not ill as she has been since," he continued, with growing severity—perhaps Leah's unruffled composure irritated him beyond his power of concealing it—"not ill in the same way. Now, may I ask if you know what is the usual course in cases like these, when invariable sickness is the result of partaking of any particular article of diet. Do you know, I say, what is usually done in such suspicious cases?"

It could not surely be a smile that lurked about the corners of Leah's beautiful mouth—that mouth which so rarely smiled—as she replied with exquisite *naiveté*:

"I should think that the most *natural* course would be for the patient not to take any more of the same food. Miss Frances Clare can have her choice of delicacies in this house of plenty."

"True," said Frederick, setting his teeth hard together, "but we know that under

some circumstances all delicacies have been found to prove equally injurious. I should be sorry to expose a guest and a relative to the bare possibility of such a catastrophe; therefore, I repeat, the common remedy and precaution must be adopted in this case. I have warned you, and I think you understand me."

"The best and surest precaution you can take," said Leah, dropping the "sir" this time, and speaking with the freedom and decision she would have used in addressing an equal, "is to send Miss Frances Clare home, where she will have her mother to nurse her, and make her jellies. If you have nothing further to say to me, I will, if you please, return to your wife, who is very ill and alone."

Mr. Leonard must, after all, have had some power of ruling his spirit, or he would assuredly have annihilated on the spot the insolent woman, his own hired servant, who thus boldly defied his threats, and counselled him as to his future line of action. He did grow very,

very white for an instant, and then there sprang a fiery circle into his cheeks as he bent towards Leah, and hissed rather than spoke into her ear:

"*My* precaution will be to have that accursed jelly analysed."

"As you please," said Leah, once more adopting the humble, quiet manner of a subordinate. "May I tell Mrs. Leonard that you will come up presently to see her?"

"Stop!" he cried, as Leah actually turned away in preparation for leaving the room, "I must have some final understanding with you before I let you out of my sight. What in Heaven's name is your object in living here at all? Am I never to know it? Do you intend to poison us all? will nothing short of this content you? I am no coward, Leah," —(this was the first time he had named her) —"but neither have I any ambition to make personal acquaintance with the fashionable *bonnes bouches* of strychnine or arsenic. My wife, too, whom I hear you have volunteered

to nurse throughout the day, how am I to feel assured that she is safe under such nursing?"

It is certainly not many women, innocent or guilty, who would have stood tamely by and listened to such an implication as the one plainly enough conveyed in Mr. Leonard's words to his housekeeper, but Leah did not so much as wince or change colour under it. She only approached a few steps nearer to her master, and said in a clear, steady voice:

"I would give my life—a less valuable possession to me now than it was a year ago—to save the good and gentle lady you have married, a single one of the heart pangs *you* will bring upon her. For the rest I must leave you to your own thoughts and suspicions, which will no doubt be worthy of you; but, as you said just now, you are no coward, except where your pride of birth and family is concerned, and therefore probably you will choose to bear them. I am going back now to Mrs. Leonard."

"And you have no fear concerning the analyzing I spoke of?"

Apparently something in Leah's last words had helped Frederick Leonard in gaining a command over himself, for his voice was free from either sternness or threatening as he asked her this question.

"My fears have ceased to concern you as entirely as my hopes have done," she said proudly, and moving towards the door. "You are master here, and can do what pleases you."

To be entirely baulked and set at nought by a woman—and that woman ostensibly an inferior—would certainly be galling above most things to any proud, imperious man; to Frederick Leonard it was little less than maddening; but there was no help for it, as Leah with her last words walked calmly to the door, unlocked it, and passed out. What her thoughts were concerning this interview with her master it would not at present be easy to guess; what his were, anybody might

have divined who had witnessed the white passion exhibited in his countenance as he strode up and down the long room on being left alone, clenching his hands, and manifesting sundry other uncomfortable tokens of wanting to vent his rage on somebody who might prove more sensitive to his threats and denunciations than Leah Ash had done.

He had this excuse for his conduct—that he did believe firmly that the jelly had been poisoned, and that his housekeeper had done it out of wicked, woman's spite against Frances Clare; but he had spoken falsely when he said that Alice and some of the other ladies were suspicious on the subject. If Alice had the most transient thought of the kind she had kept it carefully to herself; probably she thought her foolish sister's good name of more importance than even the just exposure of the malignant person who might have sought to injure her. At all events, she told no one except Frederick what the invariable effect of the jelly (to which Fanny,

who was fond of sweets, had unfortunately taken a liking) had been; and after the last glassful the invalid had begged for and eaten, Alice, in a fit of anger at its result, had thrown every atom of the remainder away.

This, too, was known to Frederick; therefore it was a second lie he told when he said to Leah that he intended having the jelly analyzed. He had hoped to frighten her into a confession of her supposed crime, and to get her once and for ever under his feet; but Leah had exhibited no fear at all, and though he still believed her guilty, and believed, too, that she would be capable of still further atrocities, he had no choice but to let the matter rest as far as she was concerned, unless by expelling her from the house he made up his mind to expose himself to what he dreaded even more than the poison he had now little doubt she would, on sufficient provocation, administer even to him.

That his wife was safe from her, Leah's

own recently-spoken words—words that bore the unmistakeable impress of truth—led him to feel assured; and although in his sober moments this conviction could not be otherwise than satisfactory to him, it caused him just now, in the mad excitement of his feelings, to rank his innocent Lizzie on the side of the woman he had so much reason to detest, and to look upon her therefore as almost equally his opponent.

Besides, if a tyrant has no one else to vent his evil tempers on, he must naturally and inevitably vent them upon his wife. A trifling illness is not to stand in the way of so manly an exercise of power and superior strength. Frederick Leonard had never seen his wife ill, and having always understood her to possess an admirable constitution, he had really very little faith in the seriousness of her present indisposition. Isaure had hinted to him that Miss Ash wanted an excuse for fussing over her young mistress, and that she had made the most of an insignificant

attack of faintness in which she had discovered Madame in the morning. The French-woman had apparently quickly forgotten her own cowardly fears on the subject of this same illness she had now spoken so lightly of, but unjust rebuke often affects the memory, and had not Leah very unjustly rebuked this poor faithful creature not two hours ago?

Acting upon Isaure's report and his own convenient impressions, Frederick sought his wife's room in about ten minutes from the time Leah had left him. Lizzie had been feverishly and anxiously expecting his entrance ever since she knew he was in the house. In spite of all that had passed in the morning—all that had passed during so many heavy weeks, this little simple-hearted wife still believed in her husband's love, still cherished the conviction that far down in the depths of his heart was a place sacred to her alone, where no flirting, forward girls, no unauthorized intruders of any kind would ever be permitted to enter. That her husband was a

man of violent temper, of selfish habits, of reckless indulgence in whatever happened to be the fancy of the moment, Lizzie could indeed no longer doubt; but that the deep affection he had once so entirely persuaded her of, and of which she believed, poor child, he had formerly given such unquestionable proofs, had ceased, or ever would cease but with his life, she could not have admitted as a possibility even had an angel stood before her and proclaimed it as a fact.

When he opened the bed-room door and came in (Miss Ash was not present now) Lizzie raised herself upon her pillows, and with all her affectionate, forgiving heart speaking in the pale wistful face she turned to him—exclaimed, stretching out an eager hand:

"Dear Frederick, I have so longed for your coming—do kiss me now, and say you have forgotten all but my sorrow for having offended you this morning."

It is just possible that had the husband come straight into his wife's presence on his arrival at home, and thus escaped both his short interview with Alice Clare and his longer one with his presumptuous housekeeper, this appeal from the fair, white-faced little girl upon the bed might have softened his heart, and inclined him to consent to a reconciliation; but, as the reader knows, all the wrath, and acrimony, and bitterness of his nature had been roused before he saw her; and he was alive to nothing now so much as the strong necessity for venting these upon somebody else.

"I am not likely to forget any of the occurrences of this ill-omened day," he said, taking no notice of the little pleading hand, and striding past the bed to the window. "You don't know, I suppose, that Fanny Clare has been poisoned, and that the guilt of the diabolical deed lies between you and that woman we have been unfortunate enough to

get for a housekeeper—the jelly you had made has other ingredients in it besides those mentioned in your mother's recipe."

If Frederick had even, for a single moment, under the influence of a passing aberration of intellect, or through the suggestions of a mocking demon, admitted to his own mind the possibility of his young, guileless wife being capable of injuring her greatest enemy by so much as a thought, there might have been just a shadow of an excuse for his present brutal address to her, as she lay there in her sick helplessness—but nothing of the kind was the case. He knew as certainly that she was innocent in this matter of the poisoned jelly, as he knew that her pure, true heart was still all his own, and he spoke only under the dictates of the passionate, ungoverned spirit that was raging within him, and urging him to torture whatever or whomever he could find to writhe the most sensitively beneath his lash.

There was not much merit indeed in crush-

ing so very poor and pitiful a little victim as Lizzie—she was so soon and easily crushed. Her startled, horrified mind receiving her husband's words in their most literal sense, had barely time to gather in their full import before the cold shivering and faintness of the morning returned upon her, and in less than an hour the whole household was in a state of confusion from the news having been circulated amongst servants and visitors that two physicians had been sent for from Penzance, and that the young mistress of Pengarthen Hall was dying.

She was not dying; but her first fond hopes of motherhood had been blighted by her husband's rashness and cruelty, and even her mind had narrowly escaped being injured permanently by the utterly heedless shock he had so abruptly given her.

CHAPTER II.

A FINE GENTLEMAN BORED TO DEATH.

With the mistress of the house laid upon a sick bed, and the master of it too utterly out of temper to make himself agreeable to anybody, it was not to be wondered at that the guests assembled for amusement and gaiety at Pengarthen Hall should wing their flight precipitately from so uncongenial a locality. The Clares were the first to go, Fanny quite as anxious, at length, as her sister to say farewell to Cornwall. They had both strenuously resisted Frederick's wish that the doctor in attendance upon his wife should see and

prescribe for Frances. When once the jelly had been put away the sickness had subsided, and there was, therefore, they declared, no need at all to have any further fuss made about an illness that a few days' rest at home would doubtless entirely cure. Miss Fanny carried her diamond bracelet away with her; it was a pretty thing, to say nothing of its value, and perhaps in time, as she was not a young lady of any great depth of feeling, she might come to look at it and even wear it without being unpleasantly reminded of certain unpleasant things in connection with her visit to Pengarthen.

When all the rest of the once gay party had followed the Clares' example and betaken themselves to sunnier regions, Frederick's gloominess and irritability with everybody around him—his poor sick wife, of course, not excepted—became something very trying to witness, and very difficult to bear. Mrs Leonard, senior, had volunteered the moment she knew what had befallen

Lizzie, to come and take care of her until some of her own friends could arrive.

Mr. Leonard, indeed, would not have deemed it necessary to send for them now that he was satisfied his wife was in no absolute danger; but his stepmother, reading the unspoken yearning in the sad eyes so often lifted lovingly and gratefully to her own, had given him no peace until he had written for either Mrs. Anstruther or Sarah to come down to Pengarthen and stay while Lizzie should remain an invalid.

"This is very good of you, dear," said Lizzie on the day he told her what he had done, "I do believe the very sight of either my mother or Sarah will make me strong and well again. And it will relieve Mrs. Leonard too, who has been so excessively kind and attentive to me. I don't know what I should have done without her at the first, Leah having been obliged to go home."

Frederick frowned darkly as he always did at the most casual mention of Miss Ash's

name, but his back was to his wife's bed, and she did not guess that she had excited his displeasure.

"Long may she be detained there," he said, crushing ruthlessly a fly that had been buzzing happily in the pane. "I dislike and mistrust that woman more than any person in the world. *You* won't see a fault in her, because she pretends to some romantic and impossible devotion to you—as if a handsome servant ever yet really liked a pretty mistress—but I tell you she did her best to poison Fanny Clare (perhaps Fan had treated her disdainfully), and but that the Clares are my own relatives, and that they dreaded, as weak women do, any open scandal, I would have had an exposure at the time. Let her look out, however, when she comes back, for the next trick of the same kind shall cost her dear."

Frederick had been very fond, since their housekeeper had gone home to attend the death-bed of a young sister, of talking in this

strain, and heedless of the sick shuddering that came over his timid wife at the most distant allusion to his old suspicion about the jelly, of boasting what he might have done to punish the criminal, and what he would still do were she ever again to attempt a similar offence. Of course Lizzie could not help wondering exceedingly that, with his opinion of Leah, he should not at once dismiss the woman from their employ. He said, indeed, that he was bound by some promise to her father, who had on an occasion of great emergency done him an important service; but this did not appear a sufficient reason for harbouring a person whom he professed to believe guilty of an intent to murder; and the wife, though in her own mind entirely satisfied of Leah's perfect innocence, felt bewildered and uncomfortable whenever she contrasted her husband's avowed impressions on the subject with his apparently reckless conduct.

For was it not the extreme of recklessness to maintain in a position of trust and respon-

sibility in a family an individual who, on the smallest provocation, might take it into her head to administer poison to any one of them?

On the present occasion the wife said as she indeed had more than once said before:

"But I cannot see, Frederick, why, under any circumstances of obligation to Mr. Ash, you are bound to keep Leah attached to your household. Why not let them have the farm rent free, or give a marriage portion to one of the other daughters, or find Leah a situation more in accordance with her character than the one she has here? Surely anything would be better than living under the same roof with a person you suspect as you do Leah?"

"You talk of what you know nothing about," replied the husband, crossly, as he missed another fly he had devoted to destruction; "besides, I am not a child or a woman to be afraid of getting hurt. *You* are safe, at all events, and therefore have no need to concern yourself about the matter. I think I

can deal with Leah single-handed, and anyhow, she shall not have the triumph of believing she has made me fear her. I should have been glad indeed, had it not been for your unfortunate illness," (Frederick always spoke as if Lizzie could have helped her illness), "to get away from this diabolical place for awhile. I *must* be here at Christmas, worse luck, because my ancestors—a set of idiots they must have been—have from time immemorial given a feast to their tenantry and presided over it in person at this season; but it wants nearly four months of Christmas yet, and we might have gone for a change to the Erskines, or the Veres, or even to Linden Park, where we are always certain of a welcome. I shall die of sheer ennui, or go melancholy mad, if I am to stay alone in this house of gloom much longer."

"I am so grieved to be ill, for your sake, dear," said Lizzie, who knew that Frederick was not the only man in the world incapable of feeling sympathy, or exercising patience

with sick people; "but why do you stay so much alone downstairs? It is perhaps not lively up here, yet I think if you could conquer your prejudice against Mrs. Leonard she might often amuse you a little. You have no idea what a cheerful, animated, even witty person she is. Do come up to-night after your dinner; she has promised to spend the evening with me."

"Oh, just catch me at it!" exclaimed Frederick, making a very suggestive grimace, and revenging upon a third fly the defeat he had sustained with the second; "why, the other day, when I came in accidentally, not knowing the old girl was here, I heard her reading doggerel hymns or psalms aloud to you. Is that what you call being amiable and witty?"

"I do not mean that she cannot be grave and serious at times," said the wife, with a faint colour overspreading her pale cheek. "If you were going to read to me, Frederick, unless I asked for any particular book, would

you not naturally select one you considered worthy of being listened to?"

"Well, only mind this," retorted the amiable gentleman, moving slowly in the direction of the door. "If you turn into a saint, I shall become ten times a bigger sinner than I suppose you and your new friend believe me to be at present. It is not, indeed, out of the limits of possibility that I may cut my stick altogether—I beg your pardon for talking slang—and leave you to ripen the quicker, without my evil example, into the pattern of all excellence, which, sooner or later, psalm singing and railing against the world's vanities will make of you."

"Oh, Frederick," exclaimed Lizzie, in a pained, half-choking voice, "you only say these cruel things to tease me. If I were indeed a saint, or likely to become one, I might bear better than I do the unkind words you too often now address to me. I wish I knew any means of pleasing you or making you

happier, but all I do lately appears to be utterly wrong."

"I am bored to death," said Frederick, stopping for a moment at the foot of the bed, and contemplating his sick wife gloomily; "my health is giving way under the dull monotony of my present existence. If Sarah comes to you I think I shall go over for a week or so to the Erskines; you won't want me with your sister here, and Ned writes nearly every day to entreat me to come."

"Pray go, then, if you would enjoy it," Lizzie said immediately, and without betraying any fraction of the pain she really felt at the thought that her husband could leave her in her weakness and suffering. "I shall be glad to know you are with friends you like, and, indeed, you have not looked quite so well as usual lately."

"I am far from well," the husband continued, his temper a little improved at finding Lizzie not inclined, as he had suspected she would be, to oppose his wishes, "and I

do consider a change of some kind absolutely indispensable. I can ride over once a week to see how you are going on, or send Ned on the same errand. I—"

"Oh, please don't, if Sarah is here," Lizzie interrupted eagerly. "I know it would be painful for her to meet him, and I should think for Mr. Erskine himself it would not be too agreeable. Besides, dear, I shall like to see you as often as you can come."

Frederick laughed and said, "Oh, very well," he would see about it, and then as another thought struck him he added—

"By the bye, I wish, as soon as you are strong enough to get down stairs, you would ask the Chesters to dinner. They have been very civil in coming constantly to inquire after you, and we owe them, I suppose, this attention. That vicar is, no doubt, a well-meaning man, but he wears me to a thread, and his wife is simply a badly-constructed machine for talking proverbs and the oldest truisms."

"But surely," Lizzie urged, "they would estimate the civility of being invited to dine here much more when you were at home. It will look, will it not, as if your absence was made the opportunity of performing a disagreeable duty?"

"Then for once," said Frederick, laughing again, "the seeming will not give the lie to the reality. It is just because I cannot endure the infliction myself that I propose your getting over it while I am out of the way. Women don't mind being bored, and, besides, you have been accustomed to associate with country parsons and such like all your innocent little life. We will consider the affair settled."

Of course the wife could only meekly acquiesce. It was not on her own account that she had for a moment pleaded against her husband's suggestion. And day by day, almost hour by hour, she was learning that that husband's will and pleasure were to be the sole guides and directors of her conduct

through life—the life she had once seen flooded with such golden sunshine, and along whose radiant pathway she had walked, in imagination, with woman's brightest crown upon her head.

Alas, poor wife! that crown had very soon been dashed beneath her feet, and the pale one she still carried in her trembling hands had more thorns amidst its faded roses than she dared to count.

CHAPTER III.

SARAH AT PENGARTHEN.

"*This* my Lizzie?" exclaimed Sarah Anstruther, as, five minutes after one of the Hall carriages had deposited her at her brother-in law's door, she was bending, with wet eyes and a face of dismay and grief, over the beloved sister whose altered appearance had evidently far exceeded her fears.

Yet Lizzie was really looking her best today; for, in honour of Sarah's expected arrival, she had risen and dressed herself for the first time, and the pretty invalid cap, with its blue ribbons, and the rich cashmere shawl, wrapped carelessly around her, had

contributed to soften the ravages that illness and anxiety of mind had made in the fair, girlish face, which, in spite of all, was still touchingly beautiful.

Up to the hour of Sarah's arrival she had been in moderately good spirits; but who does not know the strangely agitating effect of seeing a very dear or near relative, one whose love we are quite sure of, after the waters of a great trial have swept over us? The first rustle of Sarah's dress, the first sound of her voice, had been enough to unnerve poor Lizzie, even before the long, tender embrace was given; and when the elder sister made the exclamation above recorded, the younger one was sobbing hysterically, and clinging, like a frightened child in pain or danger, to the kind hands that had so fondly sought her own.

"My darling, I had not dreamt your illness had been so serious. Your husband gave no hint of this—he must have feared to alarm us. Speak to me, dearest—tell me you are a

little better. This is a heart-breaking meeting indeed."

"Oh, I *am* better, I am nearly well;" Lizzie managed to utter, at length, through quivering lips that almost gave her words the lie—"only I was upset just at the first moment of seeing you, my own Sarah. I have wanted you so much; I have been counting the hours, even the minutes, till you could arrive. And now I am so glad, so happy you cannot think. They shall bring you your dinner here, that we may still be together, darling. I am dying to hear all the home news, and especially about Willie, poor dear Willie!—you said in your letter that he was still weak and ailing. Is it worse than this, Sarah? You must let me know everything now."

"I will, love, if you will keep quiet and not excite yourself with talking," replied Sarah, as she noticed with alarm the burning flush that had succeeded the dead whiteness of the invalid's face. "Now, lie back on

your pillows, while I take off my bonnet and shawl, and then I will return and sit beside you, and talk to your heart's content—till Mr. Leonard comes and drives me forcibly away."

"No fear of that," the wife said, struggling successfully this time to keep back the tears. "Frederick was not very well, and the gloom of the house depressed him terribly; so, as you were expected to-day, he left me this morning—I quite wished it, Sarah—to stay a fortnight with some friends at a little distance. Men, you know, are always out of their element in a sick room, and it *was* very dull for him quite alone down-stairs."

Sarah Anstruther had turned towards her sister when she first began speaking, and she remained in the same attitude, standing and looking at her fixedly, though apparently with some absence of mind, until the voice ceased. Then, without a word of comment or reply, she continued her progress to the dressing table, silently taking off her travell-

ing wraps, and smoothing the glossy raven hair which, still beautiful in itself, had once crowned one of the loveliest faces in the universe.

"Lizzie, what do the doctors tell you? do they promise you health and strength speedily, or is your recovery to be a slow, tedious affair?"

So spoke Sarah as she resumed her seat by her sister's couch, and drew down the little head to nestle upon her shoulder. She had received a shock in that first view of her darling, and she could think of nothing else at present but the illness that had so cruelly changed her.

"Oh, they say I shall get well directly, as soon as I can have fresh air and exercise again. Mrs. Leonard has been more than a mother to me—ah, Sarah, do you remember how I misjudged this dear, good, tender-hearted woman? but, indeed, everybody has been very kind. Frederick was, I think, sorry to leave me when it came to the last. He

went into the conservatory, and gathered me a bouquet himself of all my favourite flowers —there they are in that vase upon the table —I don't think any flowers ever seemed so sweet to me. Husbands, you know, don't often remember these little things. And he said he should ride over in three or four days at most, and that he hoped one of us would write *every* day."

"Where has he gone?" Sarah asked, at this point, less from any interest she felt in the matter, than because she feared Lizzie was now disposed to talk too much.

"Dear Sarah, I am so sorry to be obliged to tell you, so sorry even to name the hateful name; but you must know it sooner or later. It is to the Erskines, Frederick has gone. He will not give them up to please me; and, as I mentioned to you before, Edward was staying here when the house was full of people."

"Dear child," Sarah said, quite calmly, "do not for a moment be distressed on my

account. The time has long gone by, when the mention of that gentleman's name would give me any painful emotion. I should be sorry, indeed, to meet him again; but of this, I presume, there is no chance."

"Oh, I hope not," Lizzie answered eagerly —"he will know from Frederick that you are here; and now that the house is empty of guests, it would in any case have small attractions for him. Have you seen the Clares since their return home?"

"Alice called once—not Frances. She spoke very little of their visit to you; and that little, somehow, impressed me with the idea that she had not particularly enjoyed it. I meant to ask you if anything had occurred to disappoint or annoy her. I think Alice is a well meaning, affectionate girl, and I feared that she might have disposed of her heart prematurely. Do you know if such was the case?"

"I believe not. I never saw her flirt with any one; and, except Edward Erskine, we

had no actually young men amongst us. I am nearly sure Alice was quite indifferent to *him.*"

"So much the better for her own happiness. And Frances? was she as discreet as her sister; or did her pretty face attract either of your guests to encourage her coquettish propensities? I can scarcely imagine Frances Clare remaining a whole month without a flirtation."

"Oh," replied Lizzie, thankful that her face just then was hidden from Sarah's observation—"you know what Fanny is, and may be sure she did her best to excite admiration. I am not aware, however, that either of our male visitors particularly distinguished her."

Thus, not even to the sister so fondly loved and so wholly trusted, would Lizzie show the wound that had been rankling in her heart, or breathe a syllable against the husband whose faults were already making her young life entirely miserable.

When the traveller had partaken of a little

light refreshment the younger sister again pleaded for home news, and Sarah had to acknowledge that poor Willie had returned from his double voyage very little better than when he set out, and that their own doctor was now nearly hopeless about him.

"If it had not been for this, mamma would have come to you the instant Mr. Leonard's letter arrived," continued Sarah, who perceived that Lizzie was affected at the news; "but she was reluctant to leave Willie just at first, and indeed I urged her strongly to remain. Fancy Willie himself having an intense longing to come and see you as soon as you are well enough to receive him. Do you think you shall like it, dear?"

"Like it! oh, Sarah—next to having you or mamma here, I shall like it better than anything in the world. Will he be able to bear the journey?"

"We asked our doctor about it, and he said the mild air of Cornwall would suit him admirably during the winter; and that in a

month's time, perhaps less, he might venture upon the journey."

"Oh, I am so glad. Frederick *cannot* have any objection; and it will make me so very happy. Darling Willie! what did he say about my marriage?"

"Oh, he was never weary of asking questions on the subject; first, as to your husband, then as to how you had looked on your wedding day, what you had worn, what sort of spirits you had been in, and in short everything concerning you. He says home scarcely seems like home without Lizzie. We had found that out before, however."

"Hush, hush, dear Sarah, I must not listen to your pleasant flattery to-night; we have a thousand things to talk of that are more important than poor little me. Did I tell you about Frederick gathering me the flowers before he went?"

Oh, how sadly suggestive to Sarah's foreboding mind was this recurrence to the very simple act of kindness which Lizzie evidently

thought so much of, and dwelt on with such grateful remembrance. She only said, however, in reply:

"My pretty darling! you showed me the flowers. They appear very fresh and sweet."

"Mrs. Leonard will come in by and bye to be introduced to you, Sarah. I have made her know you thoroughly in advance. She is the nicest creature you can imagine, only it is such a pity she and Frederick do not take to each other. I must say, her manner to him, on the rare occasions of their meeting, is even more freezing and repelling than his to her. I wonder what can be the cause of it."

Lizzie had wondered the same thing to herself half a hundred times before. It was not to be expected that Sarah could enlighten her on the subject, though she might think it far less extraordinary than the wife appeared to do. She told her sister now that she had talked far too much, and insisted on her trying to get a little sleep in preparation for the additional excitement of Mrs. Leonard's visit.

Lizzie felt too happy and thankful this evening to be disobedient; so as Isaure came in just then with her early tea, and said she would remain with her lady while she slept, Sarah yielded to her sister's entreaties that she would go down and take a turn on the terrace, and bring back her impressions of the outward aspect of Pengarthen Hall.

Very beautiful indeed it looked in the warm sunlight of a September evening; and Sarah Anstruther, as she strolled over the green lawn, and gazed into the silvery lake that bounded it, reflecting the dark, silent woods rising beyond, felt her whole earnest soul subdued with a sense of nature's loveliness, while her heart ached at the dreary-thought that all this was marred, as far as her darling's enjoyment of it was concerned, by one man's utter selfishness.

Strange, that nothing more was required than either the ungoverned temper or the entirely selfish spirit of a single individual to cast a pall over the radiant face of nature,

and make the eyes and heart that should have exulted in it turn away with a sick loathing and a yearning for anything rather than that marvellous beauty of earth and sky.

Had not Sarah herself experienced all this and more, in the bitter days so well remembered? Who should know, if she did not, the bleak misery of discovering selfishness and dishonour where she had looked for pure loyalty and truth? Who better than this forsaken woman could have described the heart's slow withering under a consciousness of shameless wrong, and who had felt more keenly than she had done the anguish of having lost for ever a love that had once been all her own? True she might say now, in reference to this old burden:

> "But now it has fallen from me,
> It is buried in the sea;

but at the same time she was constrained to add:

> "—— the sorrow of others,
> Throws its shadow over me."

For indeed Lizzie's sorrow, what she knew and what she guessed of it, was quite enough to fill Sarah's heart with a mournfulness that all the loveliness she was gazing on served rather to increase than diminish.

That illness alone had produced the change she saw in her darling, Sarah could not believe; besides, Lizzie's letters for a long time, though telling nothing of her unhappiness, had been scarcely less suggestive than the touching manner in which twice that afternoon the poor little wife had spoken of her husband's gathering her the flowers.

And yet, what was to be done? What human power, what human love, could avail anything now in removing from Lizzie's trembling lips the cup she had voluntarily and joyfully taken into her girl's trusting hand? Ah, there was the exceeding bitterness of it. This union was for life. Sarah shuddered as she recalled again the sick feeling that had come over her, when during their marriage ceremony those words "till

death us do part," had first smote upon her ear. The worst husbands usually lived the longest—besides, should she dare to wish that, in this case, it might be otherwise? Could she, without sin, desire a release for her beloved one, her little tender lamb, who had fallen into the tiger's claws—by these means?

Sarah shrank, frightened and dizzy, from the thoughts that pressed upon her brain, and leaving the fair scenes that had in the first instance inspired them, made her way back to her sister's room, where she found a lady waiting for her whose calm, cheerful face at once drove away, as if it had possessed some miraculous power, the evil demons that had been assailing her.

CHAPTER IV.

A GLEAM OF SUNSHINE.

Mrs. Leonard and Sarah Anstruther took to each other warmly from the very first. In many points they were congenial, if not actually kindred spirits. Both were single-hearted and unselfish to an unusual extent, and both, though from different principles, looked upon the world as a place where duty was to be performed, rather than as one where happiness was to be enjoyed.

In the life of entire seclusion Mrs. Leonard had voluntarily chosen, she had often felt keenly the want of an intellectual companion

of her own sex, to fall back upon when each day's active, and, for the most part, out-of-door duties had been fulfilled. There were many reasons why Frederick Leonard's wife, whomever he had married, must have failed to become exactly the companion and friend she needed, but putting all these reasons aside, Lizzie (as she was now) could not have supplied the want. She was a creature to be loved, petted, watched over and guided, if she would yield to guidance, bnt her extreme youth and inexperience, her childish thoughts and ways, her very natural absorbtion in her own joys and sorrows—the latter threatening alarmingly to preponderate over the former —rendered it just impossible for her to give to a woman of Mrs. Leonard's age and character, the sympathy and the companionship which would have been so desirable.

But with Sarah it was quite another thing, and even on that first evening of their meeting Lizzie felt sure that they were going to like each other immensely, and rejoiced in the

thought as sincerely as if she had gained a new friend herself.

Very pleasant and soothing it was to her then, and on many an after occasion, when her bodily weakness continued, to lie with half-closed eyes listening to their cheerful talking, and exulting in the idea that they might both be often with her thus. Sarah, having once come to Cornwall, would never shrink from coming again, and surely Frederick could make no objection, since it would interfere with none of his own plans, to the sisters enjoying as much as possible of each other's society. Lizzie was at that happy age when, the immediate pressure of a care or anxiety removed, the heart naturally rebounds from the dust into which it had been trampled and looks up hopefully to catch any rays of sunshine that may fall even obliquely upon it.

And as the days went on she could not, loving and dutiful wife as she was, conceal from herself the relief her husband's absence

really procured for her. Not to fear one hour what the next may bring, not to wake in the morning with a dread of some new excitement during the day, not to welcome the night with thankfulness because it *is* night and a season of oblivion must ensue; all this is something, and not too dearly bought by a harassed wife, at the price of a temporary separation from the man she may still truly and warmly love.

Frederick rode over to Pengarthen as he had promised to do in three or four days after he had left it, but finding Lizzie so very much better in every way, he said it would be no use for him to come again directly; it was "such a long, dull ride, all alone," and his wife knew he was not over-fond of her sister, and there were two or three nice people staying at the Erskines, and so upon the whole he was better there than at home, and Lizzie must be content with an interchange of letters.

Of course Lizzie made no opposition to his

sovereign will, but she did not look quite happy, or at rest, for a day or two after this visit. Perhaps it reminded her of those past trials which she had been struggling so bravely to forget in the calm sunshine of the present, or perhaps (for she was but the weakest of weak women after all) the thought of the "nice people staying at the Erskines" worried her a little, and set her wondering if there was a Frances Clare amongst them.

But from whatever quarter the chill wind had blown, she said not a word about it to either of her companions, and they, though making the beloved invalid always the first object of their daily interest, were both of them for the moment a little too pre-occupied (each with a distinct subject of thought) to observe that anything was amiss.

The cause of Sarah's being less alive than usual to every change in the aspect of her darling will be told by and bye. Mrs. Leonard's pre-occupation rose from the fact that her son had written to say he was coming

down immediately (having obtained his holiday earlier than he expected), to spend a month with her.

The sisters entered fully and cordially into the mother's deep joy in this bright anticipation. They knew now what *she* was, and they could well imagine what such a son as Robert Alleyne must be to her. On their own account too they would be glad to renew an acquaintance in which they both felt so sincere an interest, and the trio, as they chatted together after Robert's letter had arrived, formed many a pleasant plan for the still beautiful autumn days, in which they were to make the most of their time together, and to brighten the holiday of the hard-working London man as much as loving, admiring, sympathising hearts would enable them to do.

Lizzie had been out for a drive several times, and for a short stroll on the sunny terrace once, when their party received the eagerly expected addition, and longer ex-

cursions (having for their object all the loveliest and most romantic spots in the neighbourhood) were projected and accomplished.

Not to grow strong and well under such very favourable circumstances, and surrounded with such entirely pleasant and congenial companions, would have been next to impossible, unless the malady had been a very deep-seated one indeed. As it was, Lizzie regained her bloom and brightness, her girlish vivacity of spirit, her disposition to hope and expect all good things, in an incredibly short space of time; and whatever forebodings as to the future those around her might be troubled with, they could not for the moment do otherwise than rejoice in a happiness that was so genuine and infectious.

Of course there was a portion of each day that the sisters were left entirely to themselves —the mother and son did not meet so often that they could afford to give all their time together to amusement, or even to the most

charming and fascinating society that perhaps had ever before fallen in their way. Besides, Robert Alleyne knew as much about the poor people on the coast, and was as fond of visiting them when he came to Pengarthen, as Mrs. Leonard herself could be. Nearly every morning he went down to the village and was cccupied there until the party met for their walk or drive. Generally his mother accompanied him or joined him after her little scholars had left her, but it sometimes happened that she felt unable to walk so far, and then Robert went alone.

"I wonder," Lizzie once said to her sister, "that Mr. Alleyne has never asked us to go with him when he makes his visits to the fishermen and their families. I think it must be very nice. Shouldn't you like it, Sarah?"

"I can't tell," Sarah replied, thoughtfully, (she was more thoughtful than ever of late). "Mrs. Leonard and her son know exactly what to do and say when they go amongst the poor—they are so good and humble-

minded and devoted themselves. I am afraid *I* should feel terribly at a loss were I to venture where they do."

"You, Sarah—why I am sure you are good too," exclaimed Lizzie, warmly and almost indignantly. "I should like to see the man or woman who pretended to be better than my precious darling. What an idea!"

The "precious darling" shook her head gravely, if not sadly—

"Ah, Lizzie, my child. I am beginning to suspect that real goodness comprehends something more than I have ever been accustomed to associate with it. Till I can feel that a portion, at least, of *this* goodness is my own, I certainly shall not consider myself qualified for going and preaching to the ignorant. No doubt Robert Alleyne is quite aware that we are amongst the most ignorant, in that sense, ourselves."

Whether he were or not, it happened that on the very next morning, when the sisters

were taking an early stroll on the terrace, the gentleman in question suddenly presented himself before them, and asked Miss Anstruther if she would be his companion to the village.

Sarah coloured a little, remembering her conversation with Lizzie, but replied immediately that she would go with pleasure, and turned away at once, (knowing that Robert did not like to waste a moment's unnecessary time) to get her bonnet on.

"You don't ask me to accompany you, Mr. Alleyne," said Lizzie, rather reproachfully when her sister was out of sight—"I should like it as well as Sarah."

"The walk would be far too much for you," he replied kindly, and half smiling at her little air of pique—"You know you have an immense undertaking in prospect for today. You must husband all your strength for that."

"What, for entertaining Mr. and Mrs.

Chester at dinner? I assure you I have no dread of it at all. Mr. Chester is a very good man."

"I have no doubt of it; and Mrs. Chester is a very good woman, but she talks rather more than good women, in my opinion, ought to do; and if you are not physically and mentally exhausted from the questions she will ask you the moment she gets a chance, I will give you credit for being an angel in patience and a Hercules in strength."

"Questions, oh, I don't mind questions a bit," Lizzie said, laughing, "but if this is really the reason why you did not ask me to go with you and Sarah, I may as well fetch my bonnet at once. Do you mind having me?"

"I should be very far from minding it," he said earnestly, and laying his hand gently upon her arm as she was moving away, "if I felt it right to take you. Will you have the truth from me?"

"Certainly, why not?"

"Well, then, your husband desired my mother, before he left you in her charge, never on any pretence to suffer you to go amongst her poor friends in the village. He has a prejudice against them all, and it may be a fear of your coming to some harm. I had understood that you had received a prohibition of the same kind yourself."

"Yes, it is true—I remember;" Lizzie acknowledged with a sigh, and a momentary feeling of strong rebellion against her absent lord. "I am to do nothing that I like, nothing that might make me better, less useless, less selfish than I am at present. Sarah is very happy in being free to act as she thinks right."

"But you gave away your freedom, you see," Robert replied, with a kind attempt to dispel the cloud that had gathered over his fair companion's face, "your sister has thought hers worth keeping—that is all the difference."

"Oh, no, that is not all the difference,"

exclaimed Lizzie rather petulantly, for she considered that Robert was treating her too much like a child, "but it doesn't matter; how long will you keep Sarah out?"

"Will you be dull without her?"

"No, I am glad for her to go, she will enjoy it so very much. She was saying yesterday she was not good enough to visit the poor. Fancy Sarah not being good enough to do anything. Don't you think she is?"

"Indeed, I hope so," (with a smile) "but there are other ways of doing good, even to the poor, besides visiting and talking to them. Mr. Leonard has not prohibited you from giving to them, has he?"

"Oh, no," (eagerly), "he never said a word about that. Frederick is not in the least mean or ungenerous. What shall I give?"

"What you please, of course. Make your sister your almoner. She will see, probably, some very needy families this morning, to

whom the smallest bounties will be acceptable."

Quite consoled now, Lizzie ran to find Sarah, and to put a well filled purse into her hands.

"It was so nice and courageous of Robert to speak to me about money," she said, as she related what had passed, "some men would have been afraid of appearing anxious to save their own donations. He never thinks of himself at all when any good is to be done. Don't you like and admire him above everything, Sarah?"

"Above a great many things," Sarah frankly acknowledged; and while amused at Lizzie's odd way of asking the question she was conscious of a strong wish rising in her mind, and that not for the first time, that Robert Alleyne, instead of Frederick Leonard, had been her sister's husband.

"But how will you get on alone, darling, all this morning?" she said presently, as they

went together towards the terrace, "I think I am rather selfish in leaving you."

"Not a bit, Sarah; I shall get on capitally. I have fresh flowers to gather for all my vases, the cook to consult with about the dinner, and fifty other things to do. Now I think of it, too, Leah Ash, my housekeeper, returns to-day, and I should not like to have missed seeing her on her arrival. I told you how very kind she was to me the day I was taken ill."

"Yes, love, but that does not strike me as remarkable," said Sarah, as she twined her arm caressingly round her companion's waist, and kissed the bright young face looking into her own; "you must not, in your gratitude for this very natural kindness, forget that Miss Ash is your housekeeper, and that you are her mistress. I am afraid you are disposed to make too much of this young woman, whom I myself, I must confess, am somewhat curious to see."

"I defy you to treat her quite like an in-

ferior, Sarah. Independently of her great beauty she is accomplished and ladylike, and—oh, here is Mr. Alleyne waiting for us."

"So we will postpone the winding-up of your eulogy," said Sarah, as their friend smilingly approached them—"or perhaps Mr. Alleyne, if he is acquainted with this prodigy, will complete it for my edification as we go along. It is my sister's housekeeper, Miss Ash, we are speaking of," she continued, addressing Robert. "Do you know and admire her as my sister does?"

"I have seen her," replied Robert, becoming very grave in a moment, "and her beauty is, I suppose, undeniable; but we are rather late for our walk even now, Miss Anstruther, will you come?"

Lizzie thought he had been very cold and abrupt, but concluded he was too good and serious a man to care about women's looks, and then, by a not unnatural association of ideas, she wondered whether Sarah's plain-

ness had ever him impressed disagreeably, and whether it would be possible, in the end, if these two met often, for an attachment to spring up between them.

Oh how Lizzie wished it might be so! How her loving heart danced at the bare anticipation of such happiness for dear Sarah; how rapid were the mind pictures she sketched of what *their* married life might be. Alas! she had not so very long ago sketched even fairer ones concerning her own. This thought came suddenly and chillingly between poor Lizzie and her too sanguine imaginations. "Ah," she said to herself, with a little weary sigh, "I had better not build any more castles in the air till I have learnt to look calmly at those already in ruins."

Then she turned to go into the house for the basket and scissors, and met Leah, who had just arrived, coming from the morning room in search of her.

CHAPTER V.

MR. AND MRS. CHESTER.

THEY had not seen each other—at least Lizzie had not seen Leah—since the first day of her illness, and she could not help expressing her satisfaction at the latter's return in very warm and friendly words, which brought a sudden glow of pleasure to the now pale cheek of the usually unimpressible housekeeper.

"Poor Leah! how thin you have grown. I am afraid you have had a sad time of it. You were very, very fond of your sister, no doubt, and must feel her death terribly. Would you not have been glad to stay another week or two with your mother?"

Tears sprang to Leah's eyes, as Lizzie thus gently and kindly spoke to her:

"You are very good to me," she said warmly; "and I would far rather be here with you. My mother does not want me now I can no longer save her any trouble. If I look thin and pale it is from the actual fatigue I have undergone. I knew too little of my sister to be very fond of her—You I am glad to find almost well again, and Mr. Leonard, I hear, is absent."

"Yes, for a short time; but then, I have my dear sister with me. He found the house so dull while I was laid up, and got nearly sick himself. Of course, I was quite anxious for him to have a change."

Apparently Lizzie felt that her husband's absence needed an apology, for it was never alluded to that she did not attempt an elaborate one.

There was a manifest curl on Leah's lip, as she replied:

"I hope it may prove beneficial to him.

You are expecting company to dinner to-day, ma'am?"

"Only Mr. and Mrs. Chester. My husband wished me to ask them while he was from home. Now that you have come, Leah, I need have no further concern about the dinner. We shall be five in all. Mr. Alleyne, who is staying with his mother, will be with us—not Mrs. Leonard. Please to see that everything is very nice. Have you time now to help me gather some flowers?"

Leah was well content with this task, which kept her for a little longer beside her fascinating young mistress. She only spoke, however, when Lizzie addressed her; and once just as they were parting to say, with a quick searching glance into her companion's face:

"I am very glad your spirits are better, ma'am. I should have been afraid that you would have fretted over Mr. Leonard's" (she never said, "my master's") "absence."

"Oh, I should have missed him fearfully if my sister had not come," Lizzie answered

immediately, a little wondering, though, at the remark; "He has been to see me since he left, and I have no doubt he will soon be home again now."

"Thankful, I am sure, when he arrives, to see that you have grown strong and well without him," Leah said.

And then she quietly took up the baskets they had been filling, and went into the house.

Lizzie stayed on the lawn, pondering over a good many things—her husband, Miss Ash, and Fanny Clare's mysterious sickness amongst them—until Robert and Sarah returned from their walk. When the latter scolded her for not having gone indoors to rest before their drive, she told them she had had Leah with her a considerable portion of the time, and that she was not a bit tired.

Sarah and Mr. Alleyne exchanged a hasty look of something like distress or vexation, as Lizzie gave them, smilingly, this information; but neither of them made any comment

on it ; and she, turning to walk back with them to the house, asked full particulars concerning their morning's labours.

Sarah had been excessively pleased with the simple, uncultivated people to whom Mr. Alleyne had introduced her, and they, on their part, had received her and her bounty with grateful looks, and words which she said she felt quite humbled in listening to: "the bounty being yours, Lizzie darling, and the credit of my visit entirely due to Mr. Alleyne's kindness in taking me with him."

Robert laughed pleasantly, and said he hoped Miss Anstruther would often give him an opportunity of gaining credit on such easy and agreeable terms. And then they separated until after luncheon, when, with Mrs. Leonard added to their party, they were to drive together to some yet unvisited spot in the neighbourhood.

It was a disappointment to both the sisters that Robert's mother positively refused to dine with them. She had, indeed, always

done the same when they were alone, but they had attributed this to her wish to have her son to herself during the latter part of the day, and they had therefore hoped that as he had accepted the invitation to meet the Chesters, Mrs. Leonard would have come also. But she said "no," with such quiet firmness that Lizzie forbore to press the matter, though she could not help thinking that for once this dear, kind friend, was a little hard and disobliging.

The dinner, however, with Robert's valuable assistance in entertaining, went off not altogether badly. If the vicar felt the absence of the master of the house, as a bad compliment, he had too much self-respect to show that he did so; and as for his wife, she was not likely to quarrel with any cause which produced the agreeable effect of giving her full liberty to talk on all her favourite subjects, and to ask as many questions as might chance to occur to her.

It is true that poor Lizzie had never been so victimized by a really estimable bore in all

her life; but she endured the martyrdom heroically, even though the queries of her guest ranged over an apparently endless field, comprehending all details concerning the present, and not a few concerning the past. In particular, Mrs. Chester wanted to know why Mr. Leonard had gone away from home, what he was doing at the Erskine's, who was there besides himself, what had become of that pretty girl she used to see at church who had read one Sunday out of the same book with Mr. Leonard, and coughed a good deal during the service. And when Lizzie, with cheeks that grew too bright, had patiently replied to all this, she had still to explain why she didn't come oftener to the schools, and how she employed her time, and what she could be thinking of in having that fine, stuck-up daughter of Jabez Ash amongst her household.

As Lizzie thought this last query savoured slightly of impertinence, she answered rather coldly:

"I like my housekeeper very much. She

suits me admirably. Her education does not hinder her from performing faithfully the comparatively humble duties she has chosen for the present to undertake."

"Well, I don't believe she'd find another place in *any* capacity in this neighbourhood," Mrs. Chester said with a decided air; "the whole family are disliked, and Miss Leah above all. They never enter the church doors, nor chapel either for that matter. It is very well known that the lady who took this girl to educate—took her because of her handsome face—was an infidel, believed in nothing and feared nothing, either in the present world or the world to come. They say Leah has imbibed all her notions."

"Oh, I sincerely hope not," replied Lizzie, looking both shocked and distressed, "but of course I have never questioned her concerning her religious principles. I did not know but what she went to church every Sunday."

"Not she," continued the vicar's wife,

eagerly, and triumphing in the idea of having made an impression at last. "I don't believe she could repeat a word of the catechism if her life depended on it. I know *I* should be afraid of something dreadful happening if I had such a person living in *my* house."

"My dear," called out the vicar from the other side of the table, (he never, to do him justice, interfered with his lady's favourite amusement until he saw that she was becoming a perfect nuisance to her listeners), "my dear, won't you give Mrs. Leonard a respite now? she is looking quite fatigued."

"Now really, Mr. Chester," retorted his helpmate, bridling up, "any one to hear you would fancy I was a great talker. Most extraordinary, this idea of yours; when as a girl in my own family I invariably went by the name of the 'Silent One!'"

"Which leaves almost too much for an ordinary mind to grasp in respect of the conversational powers of your kindred in gen-

eral," said her husband, good-humouredly; "but here is Mr. Alleyne waiting to take a glass of wine with you."

Robert, who had been exchanging amused looks with Lizzie during this little matrimonial dialogue, smiled and bowed as he poured out a bumper for his loquacious neighbour.

"Ah, Mr. Robert, you and I have not had a word together yet, and I had a thousand things to say to you that my husband, as usual, has put entirely out of my head," (how thankful Robert felt at that moment to the vicar); "however, one of them I do remember, and that is to congratulate you on what Dr. Fox was telling me the other day; I mean in regard to the wonderful improvement in Miss Oliver's health. Is it true that she is soon likely to come home again for good?"

The annoyance which Mrs. Chester's numerous questions occasioned her little hostess was a mere trifle compared to the

vexation this one apparently simple inquiry excited in Mr. Alleyne. His dark cheek flushed for a moment, his brow contracted, all the lines of his face told of pain, if not of anger, and when he did reply, which was not immediately, it was to say coldly and in a low voice:

"Miss Oliver is better; but there is no hope at present of her being well enough to return home."

Then he turned from Mrs. Chester and addressed some insignificant remark to Sarah. And soon after the ladies left the room.

"I am really a most unfortunate person," exclaimed Mrs. Chester, as ten minutes later she was sipping her coffee on one of Lizzie's luxurious couches, "did you observe how angry Mr. Alleyne looked just now when I asked him about Miss Oliver?"

Both sisters had observed it, but they had not thought of applying to Mrs. Chester for an explanation.

"Well, of course you know" (this was to Lizzie), "who Miss Oliver was, and all about her?"

"No; I never heard her name till to-day," was the reply, while Sarah's signs, intended to discourage her sister from pursuing the conversation, were entirely wasted.

"Bless me! how close they are in some families. But I wonder that your husband should never have told you—she was no blood relation to him at any rate, and, after all, it is unfortunately a common case enough. Lucy Oliver was a niece of Mrs. Leonard's, by her former marriage, consequently first cousin to Robert. She was brought up by her aunt, and lived here as one of the family in old Mr. Leonard's time—a nice, pretty, gentle girl, whom everybody liked and spoke well of. It was thought that it would end in Robert marrying her, as he always seemed amazingly fond of her when he came down to stay at the Hall, but quite suddenly, while he was in London, working hard at his profession (for

her sake, as was believed,) poor Miss Lucy goes raving mad, and has been in a private asylum ever since. It nearly broke Mrs. Leonard's heart, I am told (she had become a widow then), and she has shunned all society, and lived like a hermit ever since. The expense of keeping the poor young woman in a private asylum of the best description, is, of course, very great, and I have heard that until Robert was in a position to help her, the aunt denied herself almost the necessaries of life to be able to do this. It was most unfortunate that old Mr. Leonard should have so little to leave his wife—these entailed estates are very well for the heirs, but miserable things for the widows, unless great prudence has been practised beforehand. I suppose Mrs. Leonard has always been too proud to accept assistance from your husband?"

Frederick had himself told Lizzie it was so, when she once asked him why he had never refurnished his step-mother's rooms. She believed his statement to be a true one, and

replied to Mrs. Chester's present inquiry in the affirmative. But her thoughts were busy on the subject of Lucy Oliver; she answered everything else her tireless visitor said to her at random, so that at length, in despair, that disappointed lady had to turn to Miss Anstruther and extract from her what information she could get on miscellaneous topics.

When the gentlemen came in they had tea, and immediately after the vicar told his wife it was time for them to go home. Mr. Alleyne volunteered to walk part of the way with them, and so he, too, said good-night to the sisters, leaving them to their quiet talk over the occurrences of the evening, and to their speculations concerning the great agitation he had manifested on the mention of Lucy Oliver's name.

CHAPTER V.

CALM DAYS COMING TO AN END.

Mrs. Leonard and her son had to go to Penzance on the following day—it was not difficult now to conjecture with what object—and Lizzie and Sarah, left to their own resources, wandered with their books and work down to the sea shore, and stayed under the shelter of the rocks enjoying the grand silent prospect before them, and the music of the splashing waves, as only those whom life has a little sobered *can* enjoy such things.

They talked naturally a good deal of the friends they had recently seen so much of, and both agreed as to the strong probability of

Robert having loved his cousin Lucy, and they pitied him as gentle women always pity men who have sustained any heart disappointment. Lizzie said she should ask her husband for full particulars as soon as he came home, and again expressed her wonder that he had never told her anything about the matter. He must have known Lucy so well, living under the same roof with her. Poor Lucy, what *could* have driven her mad?

"I think if I were you," Sarah rather abruptly exclaimed, "I would ask no questions on the subject at present. Sometimes it is very distressing to the relatives to speak at all of these domestic calamities. Mrs. Chester may get into trouble with your husband if he hears that she has been giving you information that he judged it best to withhold. Leave the matter where it is, Lizzie."

"But as Mrs. Chester truly observed, Sarah, Frederick is no blood relation to this poor girl. I can't think why *he* should keep it secret from me."

"Then try not to think about it at all, darling. Remember Bluebeard's wife," she continued, with an attempt at gaiety, "and don't be too curious."

"Sarah," Lizzie said presently, "you will declare that I am full of wonderings to-day if I tell you something else I have been puzzling over, but I can't help it really. I suppose Mrs. Chester's propensity to ask questions has infected me, for my mind seems turned into a note of interrogation with nobody to satisfy its craving for knowledge. Shall I tire you very much if I speak my thoughts aloud?"

"My Lizzie—could you ever tire me?"

"Well, then, I feel sure, from many, many reasons, that Leah Ash and Frederick have a more than common dislike to each other. I cannot tell you all that has occurred to make me arrive at this conclusion, because it would not be right to do so, but of the fact I am *certain;* and now what I am anxious to have explained is, Leah's taking the situation she

holds here, voluntarily, and Frederick suffering her to remain in it."

"Has there ever been a question of her leaving ?"

"I have asked him to dismiss her when he has been expressing to me his opinion of her unworthiness, but he only gets angry and says he is under obligations to her father. I should not think so much of this, however, if Leah's dislike to him were less obvious. She is not a woman to accept a subordinate situation in obedience to a father she does not even pretend to have much love for. She must, therefore, have some object, apart from a home and wages, in being here."

"She seems fond of you, Lizzie; does she not?"

"Yes, I do believe she is attached to me now, poor girl! and so I told Mrs. Chester yesterday. I like her very much; still there is too much mystery about her and her conduct to make me feel quite comfortable. I wish—"

"What do you wish, Lizzie?"

"That she would herself propose leaving. I am sure Frederick would be glad to be rid of her, though he will not send her away, nor permit me to do so. What do you think about it, Sarah?"

Sarah was sighing between her clasped hands and looking out over the restless sea. She dared not tell Lizzie all she thought, even about this matter, but she said soothingly:

"Dear child, I think if this young woman has a real attachment for you, no great harm can come of her being here. I watched her narrowly this morning while she was with us, and I do sincerely believe in her liking for you. If it were not for this, I confess I should mistrust her myself. Mrs. Chester's report was rather alarming."

"Oh, Mrs. Chester is a gossip," Lizzie said quickly; "I should not give implicit belief to all her statements. I will ask Leah, when I can get an opportunity, why she does not go to church. But, Sarah, do you suppose her at-

tachment to me will be a sufficient guarantee against her trying in any way to injure Frederick?"

"Why *should* she injure him, Lizzie?"

This was asked with a rapid, anxious glance into the younger sister's face, which, however, was partially turned away at the moment.

"I don't know. Indeed I may be very wrong and very unjust in even suggesting such a thing—but Leah is a strange woman, and by some means or other my husband has incurred her hatred. *He* does not fear her a bit, nor did I till yesterday, when her expression as I spoke of him struck me as very singular. Then, too, those stupid words of Mrs. Chester's keep on haunting me. She said, if she had such a person in her house she should be afraid of something dreadful happening. I am a great coward, Sarah, but I think I shall feel better now I have confessed my foolishness."

"Especially if we talk no more about it at

present," replied Sarah, assuming a cheerful tone as she rose and began to gather together their scattered implements of industry. "Come, darling, the sun is lower than it ought to be for the walk we still have before us. And you must remember that we are to dine an hour earlier than usual, to be ready to spend a long evening with our friends on their return."

For several days after this everything went on smoothly and pleasantly with the little party at the Hall. Sarah got quite into the habit of accompanying Robert whenever he went to the village. Mrs. Leonard was not very well just at this time, and she was often glad to stay quietly at home, and have Lizzie read to her while the others were out. The idea of being useful in any way consoled Lizzie wonderfully for not having the privilege of doing good in the manner she would have liked. She related to Mrs. Leonard how, on her first arrival at Pengarthen as its mistress, she had built towering castles in the

air concerning the improvements she would make, the benefits she would confer, the blessings she would scatter broad-cast amongst a people whom she had then fondly imagined would be as her own.

"All, all, levelled to the dust, and blown even out of sight," she said, with half a smile and half a sigh at the remembrance of the very brief duration of her glowing visions; "and now, with probably a long life before me, I must sit down with folded hands and do nothing, while others, less young and strong, work with all their might, and have none to hinder them."

"Dear Lizzie," was the grave reply; "be quite sure of one thing. If your motive in desiring to work be a pure one, springing from love and gratitude to God, He will not leave you without an opportunity of serving Him. The work assigned you may indeed be wholly different from what you would have chosen for yourself, but still it will be work, and on

the right performance of it much of your comfort and happiness will depend."

"Oh, but of course, I am not good like you and Robert," Lizzie said a little dolefully; "and I don't for a moment believe that my wish to do good has sprung from a right principle. I had heard and read, you know, of rich people with estates like ours doing all sorts o things to improve and benefit the poor around them, and when I came here I thought how nice it would be if I could imitate them. Since then I have seen how *you* work, with far less means at your command, and I have fretted over my own compulsory idleness. Perhaps if my husband gave me full liberty to do as I pleased, I should soon care nothing about it."

"I think you are unjust to yourself, Lizzie," Mrs Leonard replied kindly; "but at all events, do what you can and may *while* you have opportunity and inclination. In every human life there will occur seasons when the

weight of purely personal cares will so wholly engross the mind, that it well be next to impossible for the interests or claims of others to be remembered. I have experienced this in past years, and you, having your lot cast in the midst of a restless, exciting world, will no doubt experience it likewise."

Lizzie had no need to lay too great a tax upon her memory to acknowledge the extreme probability of her friend's prediction. But she wanted to enjoy her little hour of freedom and happiness; and, with a wisdom born late, but of rapid growth, she would not, while the sun shone, look closely either at the past or into the future.

And very warmly and brightly the sun did shine during those quickly passing days upon the four well assorted friends, who every hour seemed to be drawn nearer and nearer together—so near, that each began to shrink from the time when they would have to part, to enter upon other scenes, and to associate with other companions.

Robert had still a whole week, however, to remain at Pengarthen, and he was even talking of committing the extraordinary indiscretion of stealing a few extra days from work and London, when an event occurred which, by hastening the return of the master of the house, changed the whole aspect of affairs, and, to some at least of the party, put out the sunshine altogether. One morning Lizzie received the following letter from Mrs. Lumley Rogers:

"SWEETEST FRIEND,

"May I indulge the hope that your nerves will stand the shock of reading the formidable announcement that this letter will only precede its blushing writer (blushing, I give you my honour at the bare thought of my own presumption) by a few hours, to Pengarthen. When I refused your former most kind and pressing invitation, it was, as you know, to seek a temporary refuge from the fatigues and distractions of a too exacting

society, in a retreat that I meant to be as profound as the cloister. In some respects my intention has been accomplished; I have really stood at bay from the mad, rushing, and exhausting world. But unfortunately for my frail body, I soon found mental inactivity a thing impossible, and to satisfy for awhile the quenchless thirst of a mind whose pulse is always beating to fever time, I took up the study (fascinationg beyond all description) of the occult sciences.

"How far I have dived into its bewildering mysteries I will not stay now to tell you. I will only acknowledge frankly that my chief object in bursting upon you so abruptly is to consult some old books, which I can by no means procure here, but which, I doubt not, will be found in your husband's valuable library. Also, the fact of your gay friends having left you makes me anticipate passing a few weeks in your charming society with much more pleasure than under other circumstances I could have done.

"Let your husband share, not quite equally though, in the sentiments of warm admiration and esteem, with which I subscribe myself

"Sweetest and fairest of Lizzies,

"Ever yours affectionately,

"A. L. R."

CHAPTER VII.

THE HONORABLE EDWARD ERSKINE LOOKING A LITTLE FOOLISH.

With the sincere liking she really had for Mrs. Lumley Rogers, Lizzie found it difficult to account for the extreme depression which stole over her after reading that lady's very friendly and affectionate letter. It could not be that she dreaded her husband's return—such a suspicion was not for a moment to be encouraged—nor could it be that any of her new friends had caused Mrs. Rogers to appear less fascinating and agreeable than she had once done. No, Lizzie was neither inconstant in her likings, nor capable of ingra-

titude for past kindness, so it could only be that the thought of *any* interruption to the tranquil, happy life she had lately been leading was, for the moment, painful to her. By and bye, she was sure she should feel in the best of spirits again.

In the meanwhile the letter must be immediately dispatched to Frederick, and preparations made for Mrs. Lumley's reception. Lizzie took these duties in hand, while Sarah —at her sister's request—went to find their friends in another part of the house, and communicate to them the news.

"Then, I suppose, I shall soon be losing you, as well as Robert," said Mrs. Leonard, quite mournfully, as she drew a chair for her early visitor close to her own. "You will find Pengarthen a very different place, with your brother-in-law here; and, I have no doubt, Lizzie is right in thinking he will at once return."

"Yes, I am sure he will return," Sarah said; "and equally sure that he will do his

utmost to render my sister's home unendurable to me. Still I would try to bear all patiently, if I could do my poor darling the least good by staying. I don't believe, however, that I could. She would be constantly wounded and made unhappy on my account. Besides, as I have told you before, our sick brother has such a strong craving to come and see Lizzie that we wish, if possible, to indulge him, and one of the family is as much as Mr. Leonard is likely to put up with. I have said nothing to dear Lizzie yet, but I shall probably make arrangements for leaving this at the end of the week."

Robert, who had been standing in the window recess, turned round quickly, and looked at the speaker.

"We shall miss you," he said, in his kind, grave voice. And then he went out, and left the two ladies together.

When Sarah returned to her sister, she found that Lizzie had become partially reconciled to the new order of things. Mrs.

Lumley Rogers alone, would not be like a house full of people, and Frederick would see, by her letter, that she did not wish for any other society than theirs. Perhaps too, thought the poor little wife, now that her husband and herself had been separated nearly a month, he might feel some of his old fondness reviving for her, and if so, perhaps she might win him to love his home for its own sake, and to be content with the quiet, domestic life which constituted *her* ideal of human happiness. Lizzie believed that she had acquired greater patience, greater self control, larger wisdom altogether from her recent association with Mrs. Leonard and Robert. People not unfrequently imagine that they have made vast progress in goodness, because they have listened complacently to the words of the wise, and been aware of a sincere desire to do better than they have hitherto done.

The sisters had just risen from luncheon, and were talking of sending to enquire

whether their friends were disposed for a short walk or drive that afternoon, when the messenger, who had been dispatched with Mrs. Rogers' letter to Mr. Leonard, returned, post haste, with the following brief reply:—

"DEAR LISETTE,

"Order dinner for seven o'clock to-day —everything nice that you and your housekeeper can think of—Mrs. Rogers will, probably, arrive about six. Ned and myself will be with you as soon after that hour as possible. I shall bring no other guest; but Ned, you know, counts for nothing, and Miss Anstruther will, of course, behave to him as she would to any other intimate friend of her sister's husband,

"(In haste),

"Yours always affectionately,

"F. LEONARD."

Lizzie had commenced reading this note aloud before she had any idea of its contents. When she had finished it, her face was in a

much deeper glow than Sarah's, and her voice was trembling from indignation and distress.

"There!" she said, tearing her husband's communication into fragments, and throwing them passionately on the ground. "I can do that with the heartless words he has written; but what can I do against the selfish will that dictated them? But I *won't* let his tyranny affect your comfort, darling, however I may choose to yield to it myself. This man, this Edward Erskine shall *not* enter the house while you are here. I will send another dispatch immediately, and tell my husband that if he persists in bringing him, he will find neither you nor me to receive him. I will do this, indeed, Sarah."

The little spirit, you see, had once more clad itself in complete armour, and was going to do battle valiantly on the side of right.

"Dearest Lizzie," replied Sarah, in so calm and tender a voice, that it would have been strange had it not quieted the most troubled

waters, "you will not do this, I am sure, against my earnest wish, nor when I give you my solemn word that I can meet Edward Erskine now without pain or agitation. Look into my face, dear, and judge whether or not I am speaking the truth."

"Sarah, I know you always speak the truth; but even so, the insult, the heartlessness, the outrage on all proper and natural feeling, remain the same. I cannot forgive my husband for this."

Sarah had reason to believe that Lizzie had forgiven him graver offences against herself, so she said, drawing the still burning face close to her own, and kissing it lovingly:—

"Darling, you will forgive him even this, for my sake, because I ask it, and again assure you that it will cost me nothing to meet Edward Erskine again. If you knew how comparatively insignificant things that once appeared important, have grown to my apprehension lately, you would the more readily believe what I am telling you. Now, had

you not better obey the instructions you have received about dinner, and then we can get our walk."

Mrs. Leonard and Robert joined the sisters on the terrace half an hour later, and to the former Lizzie communicated the message she had received from her husband. The one bitter romance of Sarah Anstruther's early life was pretty extensively known in Cornwall, where, at the time of her engagement to Edward Erskine, her great beauty had attracted universal notice. Mrs. Leonard had never openly spoken of this very delicate matter to Sarah's sister, but a chance allusion before Sarah arrived at Pengarthen, had convinced Lizzie that she knew all about it, and a hope that she might suggest some means of preventing a meeting between the two who had once met so differently, induced the still indignant wife to speak of it to her now.

Mrs. Leonard pondered a moment or two before expressing her thoughts on the subject. Then she said:—

"I will ask Sarah to come to me for the few days she will yet remain at Pengarthen; but if I were in Sarah's place, I would stay where she is, and show this cowardly man—a man *must* be a coward, who, after injuring a woman, will insult her—that his presence can in no way affect her. Go on to Robert, will you, and send Sarah back to me."

Apparently Mrs. Leonard's view of the matter was entirely shared by Sarah, for she told Lizzie, when they were alone again, that she had declined her friend's cordial invitation, and that the thought of the approaching meeting did not quicken her pulse by a single throb.

So Lizzie was silenced, if not convinced, and she kept to herself the purpose she had formed of getting her husband to invite Robert Alleyne to join their party at dinner that first day. She knew he liked Sarah, and she believed that he would stand between her and any covert insults or open slights to which she might chance to be exposed. Mrs.

Lumley Rogers would not regard him as a stranger, and, indeed, Lizzie had some vague notion that he was an especial favourite in that quarter. At any rate if Frederick was unwilling to have him with them, she would manage to enlist Mrs. Rogers on her side. A little manœuvring in so good a cause, to soften what Lizzie still persisted in thinking would be a terrible ordeal to her sister, seemed not only excusable but right. Her husband should have known better than to have made anything of the kind necessary.

The gentlemen arrived nearly an hour earlier than they had been expected, and consequently before Mrs. Rogers. Frederick brought in his friend to the room where the two ladies were sitting, and after a careless—"You see there are no strangers, Ned, so make yourself quite at home," left Mr. Erskine to get on with Sarah as he could, and stretching himself on a sofa, told his wife (whose crimson cheeks he only remarked as heightening her beauty) to come and kiss him.

If Lizzie had not first seen that Sarah was really as calm and self-possessed at the sight of her former lover as she had promised to be —that of the two, *his* face betrayed by far the most discomposure—it is doubtful whether this gracious command would have been obeyed. Even as it was there appeared no great eagerness in her manner as she walked to the sofa, and instead of whispering to her husband (as, under other circumstances, she would have done) how delighted she was to have him home again, her first words were, as laughingly he drew down her sweet face to his own:—

"How could you do this, Frederick? I would never have believed it of you."

"Lisette," he said aloud, "you are certainly prettier than ever. It is a bad compliment to me to grow so handsome in my absence; but I think I must forgive you in consideration of the pleasure I have in admiring you now that I have come home. Ned, old fellow," releasing his wife's hand, and

twisting round his neck to get a view of the other two occupants of the room, "what are you about?"

Mr. Erskine, in point of fact, was about nothing. He had greeted Miss Anstruther with far less assurance and impudence than he had thought and hoped to exhibit. Her extreme calmness and indifference had taken him by surprise. He had supposed that she would have blushed and trembled, and manifested all the usual signs of feminine weakness and agitation.

He and his friend had calculated on having some quiet fun at poor Sarah's expense. They had no intention of openly insulting her, but Mr. Leonard had said in an idle moment he would give worlds to see the meeting, and the honorable Edward Erskine had generously volunteered to return with him to Pengarthen, and afford him this little entertainment. Sarah was only a woman, and could not resent it in any way; and as for her sister, "She is my wife, you know," Frederick had

added, laughingly, "and if she didn't love me too well to be angry with anything I might choose to do, why I'd soon find other means of keeping the pretty darling in order."

But both these choice spirits had miscalculated as to the amount of amusement to be got out of Sarah Anstruther's torture. The honorable Edward was acute enough to perceive at once that her indifference and composure were quite genuine, and not assumed to hide any deeper emotion. His own presence of mind failed him, and in its stead arose sensations almost approaching to shame, as the low, calm voice of the woman he had once professed to love fell upon his ear, asking him courteously to take a seat, and adding some indifferent remark about the beauty of the evening.

So when Mr. Leonard turned round with his abrupt enquiry, Mr. Erskine was doing nothing, saying nothing, only standing beside Miss Anstruther's chair, and looking very

much as if he should like the ground to open and take him in.

"Come," said Frederick jumping up, and quite as ready, now that he saw his friend's discomfiture, to get amusement out of him, "come and let us change these travel stained garments, in time to receive the charming widow, Ned. Only mind, you are not to pay her any attention, because single men are dangerous, especially such noted lady-killers as yourself. Lisette, I recommend you to look out. The honourable Edward Erskine always hits what he aims at, and doesn't know the meaning of the word defeat. Eh! old fellow? But I'm hurrying you, I'm afraid. You would rather stay half an hour longer with the ladies."

It was certainly not a friendly or a loving look that Mr. Frederick Leonard drew upon himself in answer to this. But it amused him, and that was all he cared for just now. His guest muttered a few words about wanting to

scribble a note in the library, and quitted the room abruptly; and then Frederick, bidding Lizzie to be ready by the time he was, to have a turn with him on the terrace, went off in apparently excellent spirits to make an elaborate toilet for Mrs. Lumley Rogers.

"My darling," exclaimed Lizzie, nearly smothering her sister with kisses the instant they were alone, "you got through it splendidly. I never saw you look more sublimely indifferent, nor heard you speak in a calmer, quieter voice. I am so glad it is over, and that the entire victory is yours. You ought to wear a crown to-day, only indeed you are a queen without it."

"Dear child," replied Sarah, smiling rather sadly, "you are giving me a credit and a praise I am wholly unentitled to. I have not been acting, Lizzie. If I concealed any feeling of which I was conscious during the recent interview, it was one of profound pity for a man who, in seeking to humble a woman he had already done his best to injure, has

placed himself upon a level where honourable men would never stoop even to look at him. Let us talk of something pleasanter, Lizzie. It is never pleasant to me to dwell long on what I am compelled to despise."

It was while Lizzie and her husband were strolling together on the terrace, waiting for the arrival of Mrs. Rogers, that Lizzie spoke about Mr. Alleyne, and proposed that they should ask him to dinner. Five would be such an awkward number at table, she said, and one lady would have to go into the room alone. Robert had been very kind in helping her to entertain the Chesters; he was an old friend of the widow's too, who would be pleased, no doubt, to meet him again, and altogether, it seemed most desirable to have him as an addition to their party, to-day.

"Oh, hang the fellow, I can't bear him," Frederick replied, though, for a wonder, without loss of temper, "and, in his heart, if he's got such a thing, I believe he can't bear me. We shall get on very well as we are.

What does it matter about each lady having a gentleman? Ned will take you and your sister too if she minds going alone. By the bye, she's a cool hand, that young woman! Poor Ned was completely floored, and for once in his life looked sheepish. He won't get over it for a week at least, especially as he knew I was laughing at him. Upon my word, it was capital fun to see him."

"I wonder he dared to come where my sister was," Lizzie said, not able to resist this opportunity of speaking her mind. "Such a man ought to be excluded from all good society. He is too contemptible to excite even anger. How can you like or tolerate him, Frederick?

"Shut up, Lisette," replied Mr. Frederick Leonard elegantly (these sort of fine gentlemen can use very equivocal language sometimes), "I don't want to take counsel of you, concerning whom I am to like or whom to tolerate. I don't interfere with your liking for Robert Alleyne, or his sermonizing old

mother; but meek as you look, you can be a thorough little pest when you choose. I see I must draw the reins a trifle tighter, my lady, if we are to live in peace."

As he still spoke in a light, jesting tone, Lizzie did not feel much alarmed at his threat. Indeed her thoughts were too full of Sarah, and Sarah's wrongs to-day, for any personal apprehensions to find a place in them. She only said—

"I did not intend to interfere with you in any way, Frederick, and if it had been me you had insulted by bringing Edward Erskine here, I should never have spoken of it to you. I do feel it, however, keenly for Sarah, though happily, she is wholly indifferent about the matter herself. I wish you would let me ask Robert Alleyne to dinner."

"Commend me to a woman's perseverance," laughed Frederick, who appeared to have taken some specific for the preservation of his good humour to-day: "you would really make a man jealous, Lisette, if he were

humble enough to measure himself by this hero of yours. Well, ask him if you are so mad about it, only let Mrs. Rogers know it was your doing, not mine. There, you can go into the library this way and scribble him off a note. I think I heard carriage wheels in the distance, so I will walk down the avenue and meet our friend."

Lizzie was rather exultant at the idea of having gained her point. It was about the first time since their marriage that her husband's will had ever yielded to hers. Perhaps she would have enjoyed the victory less had she understood the source of her lord's extraordinary good humour, had she known that his vain nature was rejoicing in the anticipation of a new triumph, and that in the certainty he felt of winning Mrs. Rogers to reciprocate at length the admiration he really entertained for her, this selfish man was, for the moment, quite indifferent about lesser things, and, as usual, wholly absorbed in his own personal objects and enjoyments.

CHAPTER VIII.

A WINNER OF HEARTS.

Mrs. Lumley Rogers, although professing herself tired to death with her long journey, and totally incapable of opening her lips to anybody, was looking quite as fresh and charming as usual, and as usual brought with her an atmosphere of refinement, and light, sparkling gaiety which was peculiarly agreeable to the senses of Mr. Frederick Leonard. Never had that gentleman appeared more amiable or exhibited a more beaming countenance than when, with the widow on his arm, he crossed the hall of his own stately mansion, and told his fair guest in low, in-

sinuating tones how proud and honoured he felt in at length welcoming her to his dwelling.

"Another rehearsal of the old story," thought one whom curiosity or some deeper feeling had drawn to a retired post of observation, "but everything has its limits, and even wolves get snared themselves, or shot down sometimes."

Lizzie received her guest in the kindest possible manner, and seeing that she was really tired, conducted her at once to her own room. When there, she told her who they had in the house (neither Sarah nor Edward Erskine had been present on the widow's entrance), and also whom she had invited that evening to join them at dinner, adding, half apologetically:

"You will not mind, as he is even less a stranger to you than Edward Erskine, who has become, I am sorry to say, a sort of shadow of my husband's, and haunts him

everywhere. I wish Frederick had taken a fancy to Robert instead."

"You like Mr. Alleyne very much, then?" Mrs. Rogers asked, as she reclined in the easy chair Lizzie had drawn for her to the dressing table, "you have seen a good deal of him here, I suppose?"

"Yes, because Frederick was away, you know, and Sarah and myself were quite alone, or should have been but for dear Mrs. Leonard and her son. My husband will try to prejudice you against his step-mother, but it is because he does not understand her. She is one of the best and wisest women in the world. Unfortunately I can never get her amongst us when we have company. She has given up society, and lives only to do good to others."

"I must entreat Mr. Alleyne to introduce me to her," Mrs. Lumley said, looking quite as much interested as Lizzie could wish. "I am no Puritan myself, and have always dis-

liked Puritanism in my friends, but I want to know this lady who has so soon won your heart, Lizzie, and who is, I am aware, so idolized by her son."

"Then you don't mind my having asked him to-day?" Lizzie said enquiringly; "Frederick was afraid you would."

"Well, I think I can forgive you as it is a first offence," replied the widow with an enchanting smile, as she turned round in her chair and offered a kiss to her beautiful young hostess, "I am not a kissing woman, as you know," she added, laughing, "but you are such a pretty thing, Lizzie, and I believe our liking for each other is genuine."

Then Lizzie finding it was near dinner time, proposed sending Mrs. Lumley's maid to her, and warned her that Mr. Leonard was an extremely punctual man.

In the meanwhile, the hurried note of invitation had been received by Robert Alleyne, and he had read it aloud to his mother.

"You must go," she said, "for the sake of

those poor girls. Lizzie has no doubt pleaded hard for the permission to ask you. Her husband must be in an unusually gracious mood however to grant it. Is this Mrs. Rogers a special favorite of his?"

"I imagine so. She is indeed a favourite with everybody; a most attractive woman, whom society is doing its best to spoil. I scarcely think it will succeed in this case. You would like her, mother, though her world is not your world. Perhaps I may ask you to let me introduce her to you."

Mrs. Leonard looked up quickly as her son spoke; there was for a moment almost an anxious expression in her calm eyes, as she said:

"I am not likely to refuse any request of yours, Robert, though in general I shun all new acquaintances, and do not care to be fascinated by people whose hearts and affections are centered in objects I would fain withdraw my own from. You are decided to accept the invitation you have just received?"

"I think so. You said I had better go, did you not?"

"Yes—I was thinking of Lizzie and Sarah."

"Perhaps I was thinking of them too," Robert replied with a smile—but Mrs. Leonard for once did not smile back at him—all mothers, I suppose, have their special fears, and special weaknesses—she only took up Lizzie's note mechanically, and began twisting it in her fingers.

"There is no time to spare if I am to go in decent evening attire," Robert said cheerfully, (why could he not be as grave and composed as usual)? "I am sorry to leave you, mother, but I shall certainly steal an extra week's holiday now that you will lose Sarah Anstruther before you anticipated. I cannot bear the thought of London while Pengarthen is looking so beautiful."

"Stay as long as you can and may, my son," the mother replied, "but do not neglect any duty for my sake. I am used to solitude."

Robert kissed her tenderly, and then went to make himself presentable to Mr. Leonard's guests, went with so remarkably contented an aspect that his mother could not fail to notice it, nor help perhaps associating it in some way with the attractive widow just arrived.

"Yet I thought *he* was strong enough, if any could be, to resist the allurements of the world," soliloquized this good, anxious mother, as she sat where her son had left her, still playing with Lizzie's note—"None of my fears ever pointed to such a chance as this." And then she remembered Rebekah's trouble, and sighed for once very unlike the brave, cheerful, hopeful woman that she was. "If Jacob take a wife of the daughters of Heth, such as these which are of the daughters of the land, what good shall my life do me?"

But a gleam of comfort suddenly shot athwart the darkness of this unwonted mood. From twisting the bit of scented paper in her hand

into every sort of curious shape, poor Mrs. Leonard, in her abstraction, took to smoothing it out again neatly on the table before her, and thus she discovered a little postcript that Robert had forgotten, or purposely omitted to read aloud. It was only this:

"Do please come, even if you are unwilling to do so, *for Sarah's sake.*"

If Mrs. Leonard attached undue importance to the simple fact of Robert having kept to himself these few words, it must be remembered that she had never seen the fascinating Mrs. Lumley Rogers, and that women do not shrink from plainness in their own sex as sometimes even the best of men do.

Of all who met that evening round Mr. Leonard's dinner table, there was only one who wore a clouded and discontented aspect, who looked as if he had fallen out with the world, and considered the fault wholly on the world's side.

This was the honorable Edward Erskine,

a gentleman of such rare attractions that his society was ever in demand, (had not his mother assured Lizzie of the fact)? and the most casual glance of his melting eye a signal to every poor woman to encase her heart in armour of triple steel lest it should be wounded to the death! But some malignant influence had surely paled his star to-day, and rendered him liable to the vulgar imputation of being in an unquestionably bad temper. He had taken Lizzie into the dining-room, but Lizzie had conceded the very utmost she meant to concede when she suffered her gloved fingers to rest for those few minutes upon his arm. She talked freely and gaily to her other guests, to her husband when his attention could be won for an instant from the widow, and to her sister when she and Robert were not entirely engrossed with their own conversation; but to Edward Erskine it must be acknowledged she was scarcely as polite as their relative positions of guest and hostess de-

manded; and even Sarah, by frequent expressive looks, tried to warn her that she would get into disgrace.

Perhaps Lizzie foresaw already that her husband was in a fair way to become indifferent to whatever she might do, and was made just a little reckless by the anticipation of another episode similar to the one in which the heroine had been Frances Clare. However this might be, she utterly disregarded her sister's cautions, and snubbed the Honorable Edward in a manner that was not likely to win for her that gentleman's favour or esteem.

Robert Alleyne was the first to leave the dining-room after the ladies had retired. Besides the utter want of congeniality between himself and the other two gentlemen, he objected to the practice of wine drinking as a means of excitement, and never willingly remained where it was going on. There is no doubt that on this occasion Frederick Leonard would gladly have followed his example; but as his other guest, his dear

friend Ned, showed no inclination to move, courtesy obliged him to stay for a little while also.

When at length he was able to get away—Mr. Edward having drunk deeply, and fallen asleep in his chair—the master of the house found that his enchantress had been monopolised by Mr. Alleyne, and that unless by some bold stroke he could succeed in winning back her attention to himself (just now she appeared provokingly satisfied with the exchange), he should only have the miserable choice of his sister-in-law or his wife to amuse him for the rest of the evening.

A thousand Robert Alleynes might have tried in vain to make Frederick Leonard submit to so hard a necessity. While Mrs. Lumley Rogers continued to be the one particular star he was bent on plucking down from the skies, every obstacle great and small must be swept out of his way. What could that fellow mean by so coolly engrossing the entire attention of a lady who must in her

heart be wearied to death with his dull, sanctimonious talk? why didn't he content himself with Sarah Anstruther, who, of course, would be thankful for the notice of any man? Above all, what did he mean (or had Frederick's quick ears for once deceived him?) by asking the accomplished and bewitching Mrs. Rogers what time on the following day it would be convenient for her to visit and be introduced to his mother?

If Mr. Leonard had known that this inquiry had been prefaced by a very humble petition on the widow's part for the honour of the said introduction, his surprise would have been increased nearly in the same degree as his indignation.

Happily, it never occurred to him, as he had told his wife a short time ago, to measure himself either personally, intellectually, or morally, with Robert Alleyne, and so the mortification of suspecting that the latter was really doing without an effort what he, with all his selfishness and love of ease, would

have considered no effort too great to do, was for the present spared him.

His patience lasted until the tea and coffee had been despatched, and then he walked up to the pair who still sat chatting in the most friendly and apparently confidential manner together, and, smiling graciously, held out his arm to Mrs. Rogers.

"I have had the library lighted up for your especial benefit, and I shall be happy to assist you in looking for the books you are anxious to discover. I once dabbled a little in the science of magic myself, and though I could make nothing of it, I was wonderfully interested in tracing its connection with magnetism and other modern superstitions. Mr. Alleyne, my wife or Miss Anstruther will give you some music, I daresay."

Now one of the great secrets of Mrs. Lumley Rogers' attractiveness lay in the simple fact that she was genuine; there was no acting, no seeming, no humbug of any kind about her. The world in which she moved

had left its scum upon her in a variety of shapes, but none of them assumed the contemptible one of affectation, or a striving after notoriety by the assumption of eccentricities she did not possess. When she declared herself wearied and exhausted with society, and in absolute need of bodily and mental rest, she had the utmost faith in her own assertions. When she assured Lizzie that she liked her as she had rarely liked anyone of her own sex, she spoke the pure truth; and when she professed to have entered suddenly, heart and soul, into the exploded study of the occult sciences, she only stated a fact, which appeared to her own mind less extraordinary than many other things in her personal experience that the world might have thought nothing of. Could it have been a proof of Frederick Leonard's possessing, in the midst of the gross selfishness of his nature, some better gifts than he was in the habit of exhibiting to society, that he had discovered and that he appreciated this rare straightforward-

ness in the character of the woman whose external graces had in the beginning attracted his roving fancy so strongly towards her?

We may, at least, hope as much for him, although just now he was using his knowledge of Mrs. Lumley's character as a means of regaining her entire attention, and withdrawing her from a companionship that, notwithstanding his boasting on the subject, Mr. Frederick Leonard did not, in his secret heart, feel altogether easy about.

And the unsuspicious widow, with more than one matter preoccupying her thoughts, swallowed the bait so cunningly thrown out to her, and rose to accompany her host to the library.

If he had said he was disposed to believe in whatever she believed, it is more than probable that she would not have taken the trouble to discuss her new hobby with him at all—but by feigning to look upon it as nothing more than a superstition, Frederick ensured for himself an endless controversy

with the fair student of its interesting mysteries, and calculated rightly that this one evening's *tête-à-tête* in the library would be but the first step towards that close and confidential interchange of thought and opinion which he was bent on establishing between his guest and himself, and concerning which he felt as easy of conscience and as light of heart as if he had no wife to be aggrieved by his conduct, and as if he himself were exempt from all moral or social responsibility.

Robert Alleyne looked a little graver than his mother would have approved when he saw his very interesting companion so unceremoniously taken away from him. He did not ask either of the sisters for music, although he loved singing in no ordinary degree; but it was getting late, he said, and Mrs. Leonard would have had a long evening alone. Lizzie thanked him cordially for having come at all; and Sarah hoped his mother would forgive them for having robbed her of

his society now their time together would be but brief.

To all this he replied, earnestly, that he had spent a delightful evening, and that he felt himself the debtor and not the creditor in the affair in question.

The sisters walked for a little while on the moon-lighted terrace after he was gone, but neither of them seemed so much disposed for conversation as usual. Lizzie complained of a headache, and Sarah said she should be glad to be in bed. Mr. Erskine lounged into the drawing-room as the two ladies re-entered it; but he spoke no more to either of them than courtesy required, and when Frederick and Mrs. Rogers, some half hour later, came fresh and animated from their intellectual controversy from the library, they found a very dull and silent party indeed.

"Your husband has quite exhausted me with his clever arguments," said the widow, drawing near to Lizzie, whose tired face had

at once attracted her notice; "but I am not a bit inclined to yield my own opinion, and I don't despair of bringing him round to my side in the end. You have no idea what an interesting and absorbing study this old world magic is. I must initiate you into it, by and bye, and have you with us to help in looking through the books that treat of it. I have already found several in the library that I wanted."

"Oh," said Frederick, quickly, before his wife had a chance of replying, "Lisette would go to sleep in five minutes over such recondite studies. Better leave her to her novels and poetry, and accept me as your sole assistant for the present. You know I have defied you to make me a convert to your views, and if you take up the challenge it will be quite necessary that we should fight our battle alone. What have you ladies done with the gallant squire of dames I left in your company?"

"Mr. Alleyne wished us good-night im-

mediately after you went out," Lizzie replied; and one of the party observed a softer expression stealing over the widow's countenance at this information.

"I think we all look tired and sleepy," she said, the next minute; "and, for my own part, I must really be rude enough to go to bed. I want to be strong and well to enjoy your beautiful Pengarthen thoroughly to-morrow."

"Come, Ned, old fellow, and have a cigar on the terrace!" exclaimed Mr. Frederick, graciously, as the ladies retired together. "You have had a dull day of it, I'm afraid; but we must all of us experience reverses sometimes. What do you think of my widow?"

What Mr. Erskine thought of her, and the further conversation these amiable gentlemen indulged in, as they smoked their cigars in the moonlight, need not be recorded. If the testimony of one individual who, troubled with sleeplessness, took a fancy for haunting the

terrace too, may be relied on, their words were not distinguished for their edifying tendency, nor in any way calculated to raise the speakers in the estimation of those who might listen to them.

CHAPTER IX.

POOR LUCY.

Lizzie took advantage of her husband's continued good humour to mention to him the next morning her wish of having her brother at Pengarthen. It was less a surprise to her than it would have been some months back to find that Frederick had forgotten even the existence of such a brother.

"Have him down by all means, if you like it," he replied, as carelessly as if his wife were consulting him about the dinner; "the house is large enough, and we shall not be having other company while Mrs. Rogers is here. By the bye," he added, as Lizzie was

beginning her cordial thanks, "you had better have Kitty too, now you are about it; that child amuses me immensely, and she is so pretty. Mind you send for her as well; do you hear, Lisette?"

Lisette did hear, but she had no inclination for once to obey her husband's will. She had had a little specimen in London of Miss Kitty's proneness to be influenced and guided by any one who would take the trouble to flatter and make much of her. If it amused Frederick to excite or encourage her juvenile vanity, or to win her to believe there was nobody in the world like himself, he would not scruple to do it. Lizzie was quite aware of this, and she knew therefore that nothing could be worse for her little sister than having her at Pengarthen while Frederick was sufficiently at leisure to make her minister to his entertainment. Sarah had said some time ago that Kitty was better away from her brother-in-law, and Lizzie was quite of the same opinion then and now.

"I don't think mamma would like to spare them both together," she replied, to her husband's suggestion, "and, besides this, Kitty will have had a long holiday in Sarah's absence, and I could not teach her much here, you know."

And then he said, laughing:

"Oh! well, it must be both or neither, remember," and before Lizzie had time to add another word had walked out, whistling a lively air, to rob his wife's conservatories of their choicest flowers to lay beside Mrs. Lumley Rogers' plate at the breakfast table.

When Lizzie communicated to Sarah the result of her petition on the subject of Willie's visit, the elder sister decided that for this once if Mr. Leonard persisted in his determination, Kitty's interest must give way to her brother's, and the young lady be trusted to take care of herself. Poor Willie had small chance of living through another year, and it would be inhuman to deny him any innocent gratification on which he had set his heart.

Neither the wife nor the sister-in-law commented to each other on the tyranny which had created a difficulty about the matter. They both understood clearly enough that Mr. Frederick Leonard's will was not a thing to oppose, and they bowed to it, not indeed willingly, but because necessity was laid upon them so to do.

Frederick would fain have drawn Mrs. Lumley Rogers to the library again the moment breakfast was over, but the widow had an engagement for twelve o'clock, and she said that in the meanwhile she would like Lizzie to show her as much of the grounds round the house as could be got over in the time. Mr. Leonard must not abandon any of his usual morning avocations on her account. Frankly, she did not care particularly for gentlemen's society in the early part of the day.

Had this not been uttered with that enchanting grace which characterised all the widow said and did, and with a smile directed

to her admiring host which almost appeared to contradict her words, it is impossible to say how Frederick might have endured it. Even as it was, he looked ominously dark, and his handsome mouth had some very dubious curves round it as he bowed proudly to his bewitching guest, and told her that of course her will was law.

So the three ladies went out for a stroll together, and Frederick invited the Honorable Edward, who was in the best of tempers this morning, to join him in a hard gallop over the hills. The irritation of his spirit must be quieted by some means, and brisk riding was as pleasant a remedy as he could think of on the spur of the moment.

Mr. Frederick Leonard was not one of those foolish people who hug their sorrows and vexations, and, because one enjoyment is denied them, refuse obstinately to take another. He loved himself far too well to do anything of the sort, and whatever else he quarrelled with, was above the contemptible stupidity of

quarrelling with his own bread and butter, no matter in what shape it might be offered to him. I will not pretend to say that he was an agreeable companion that morning to the friend who rode beside him. The Honorable Edward might perhaps have testified to short answers and cold, cynical remarks. I only mean to assert that Frederick did not permit his ill-temper to interfere with his own enjoyment, and that is surely more than can be said for two-thirds of the ill-tempered people in the world.

The engagement of his fair guest which had so displeased him was over when they met at luncheon, and Mr. Leonard, as master of the house, had once more the satisfaction of entirely engrossing the attention of the lady he deemed worthy of his devotion. Mrs. Rogers was anxious to communicate the very favourable impression Frederick's despised stepmother had made upon her, and though no subject could have been much less acceptable than this to the unloving stepson, he listened

graciously and smilingly, because of his admiration of the lips and voice that spoke. To Mrs. Rogers' inquiry as to why he was content to see so little of his father's widow, Frederick replied, and, for once, truthfully, that she would even be more averse to a closer intimacy than himself.

"Then I am sure," persisted the privileged lady, "that you must have done something very bad indeed when you were a little boy and Mrs. Leonard had the care of you. Confess now that you drowned her favourite kitten, or stole her best preserves, or made mince veal of her pet lamb. I am afraid you would have been capable of either or all of these atrocities."

Sarah and Lizzie both observed—the latter wonderingly—the flush that deepened on Frederick's face as the widow thus lightly and jestingly addressed him. For a moment it appeared as if he were going to take the question seriously and reply to it in the same spirit, but in another instant the cloud had

passed from his brow, and he was laughing in his usual way, and saying that indeed he feared Mrs. Lumley was not far wrong, that if his memory served him he had been a very troublesome little urchin in those days when Mrs. Leonard, senior, ruled at Pengarthen.

"Well, make it all up now to please me," continued the soft voiced lady, with her most bewildering smile, (I am afraid Mrs. Lumley Rogers was by nature a coquette), "for I want to see a good deal of my new acquaintance while I am here. Saints, moulded after a common pattern, are not at all to my taste, but such a saint as this, who practices more than she preaches, and tries to smile instead of frown the world into godliness, is as rare as it is lovely. You see how thoroughly in a single interview your step-mother has contrived to charm a sinner like me."

And now we must listen to the very few words which are being exchanged nearly at

the same time between mother and son on the subject of the fascinating widow:

"You do like her, mother?" said Robert, almost pleadingly, as he came and seated himself in his favourite low chair by Mrs. Leonard's side; "I did not exaggerate her attractions, did I?"

Mrs. Leonard took time for an inward, inaudible sigh before she answered:

"I agree with you, Robert, that the world has not yet spoiled the lady you seem anxious for me to admire. She is frank, and bright, and charming enough to justify—"

"Even my approval of her," laughed the son, as the speaker paused for an instant, "and considering how long I have kept my heart locked 'in a case of gowd,' as the old Scotch ballad has it, that is saying a great deal, is it not, mother?"

Once more this light mood of Robert's jarred strangely against Mrs. Leonard's graver humour; he was so rarely light, and

had ever professsd a strong distaste for jesting.

"I was about to say," she continued, raising her still bright, earnest eyes to his unclouded face, "that Mrs. Rogers was charming enough to justify, or at least account for, Frederick Leonard's admiration of her. She is something different to the ladies who have hitherto attracted his roving fancy, and will, I should think, have propriety enough to stand aloof from any undue attentions from a married man."

"I would trust her with a thousand Frederick Leonards," Robert replied warmly; and then his mother, laying her hand lovingly upon his shoulder, said in a tender but not joyous voice:

"My son, we will talk more of this lady another day. If her attractions in your sight go, or ever should go, beyond a certain point, rest assured I shall do my very utmost to behold her with your eyes. Now let us have a walk to the village."

There was a smile not quite easy to read on Robert's lips as without another word he turned away to prepare for the stroll to which he was invited.

Notwithstanding the fact, that for two or three private reasons, Sarah Anstruther did all she could to hasten her own departure from Cornwall, she yet stayed long enough to become convinced that her brother-in-law was very much in earnest in the attentions he now lavished without the least disguise upon Mrs. Lumley Rogers. Perhaps to Sarah's unworldly, upright mind, it might appear that the widow's contented acceptance of this public homage from a married man savoured too much of levity to make it easy to excuse her part in it; but then she did not know, that in the first place, Mrs. Rogers had—in spite of her ever charming spirits—an intensely preoccupied mind, and in the second place, that she truly believed in Mr. Leonard's devotion to his wife. She was accustomed to be petted and worshipped in society—and, having

genuine rectitude of principle and a pure heart, had always felt an unlimited faith in her own dignity as a shield against any unauthorised gallantry either from single or married men.

There was no one at Pengarthen bold enough to warn her that she was treading on dangerous ground, or even to hint that the poor wife, who was fast learning to cover her heartaches with careless smiles, noted every tender look, writhed under every low-toned word that her husband scattered broadcast in the path of the guest to whom Lizzie was bound by many obligations of personal friendship, as well as of hospitality, to show kindness and consideration.

That she never failed in this duty, even when sorer temptations to do so came, must be reckoned as some small merit on the part of a weak little girl who, as we have already seen, had a sadly impulsive nature, and was too apt to obey the dictates of that unreflecting spirit which, for all it was so soon cowed,

had a very warlike voice when it first rose up and began to utter its indignant protest against wrong.

At the parting interview between Sarah and Mrs. Leonard, these two ladies spoke more openly and unreservedly of the probable trials which Lizzie's marriage had entailed upon her than, even to each other, they had yet ventured to do.

"I am afraid," Sarah said, with deep anxiety written in every feature of her face, "that my poor darling is just the last woman in the world who ought to have married Frederick Leonard. She had been so spoiled at home, so accustomed, from her babyhood, to unlimited affection and even adulation, that though it will take her a very long time to become convinced that her husband does not care for her, the conviction, when it *does* come, will go nigh to kill her. She suffers acutely—I, who know her so well, can easily see this—in believing that other women have power to interest him even tem-

porarily, that he can be so far unmindful of her feelings as to flirt with them openly; but I am certain she still clings to the fond idea that his *heart* is all her own, and that one day she may win him wholly back to her."

"And you have no faith in her capability of doing this?" Mrs. Leonard asked, gravely.

"Scarcely any. In the first place, I cannot help thinking Frederick Leonard, according to human reasoning, beyond the hope of being won from his overwhelming selfishness—it is something so apparently rooted in his very nature—and in the second place, I fear, as I said just now, that Lizzie is the last person likely to influence such a man, supposing he *could* be influenced, beneficially."

"Why do you so judge?"

"From my intimate knowledge of her character. She is impulsive and unreflecting—has little patience and not much self-control. While she continues to love her husband, she will suffer too intensely to have strength or thought for anything *but* suffer-

ing. And when, if ever, she ceases to regard him with a wife's fond, all-pardoning affection, utter dislike and contempt will supply its place, and everything will go wrong with her."

"Perhaps not. There have been cases of wives who, compelled by overwhelming evidence to despise their husband's characters, have yet faithfully kept their own marriage vows, tended these bad men in sickness and health, watched over them as they would watch over an erring child, been patient with their every fault and infirmity, and in the end won them back to virtue and respectability."

"I do not doubt it—but I doubt if my poor Lizzie could be such a wife."

"She could if she sought for strength and wisdom at the fountain head. *You* cannot think so badly of Frederick Leonard as I do, or have half the reason for holding him in contempt—yet even of him I would not say 'there is no hope'—and certainly of all human means for reclaiming a bad, selfish man,

none are so likely to prove effectual as the patient efforts of a tender, loving woman."

"But that woman must have a special nature and special capacities—with some qualities of head, if not of heart, which my Lizzie has not and never can have."

"Don't you believe then in the power of grace to supply the deficiences of nature?"

"I dare not question that," Sarah replied, meekly; "but you know that, at present, Frederick's wife has given no evidence of being a seeker of divine grace. The bitter cup she has to drink floods all her soul, and leaves no thirst for the living waters."

"Yet nothing is more likely than this same bitter cup to send her at last to the only pure fountain. Dear Sarah, try to commit the sister who is so precious to you to the kind Father you yourself have begun to serve. As far as human tenderness can shield her, I will shield her when you are gone. I shall need some great interest of this kind to console me for losing you and Robert."

Sarah's face had been very grave before, but it became even graver and sadder as Mrs. Leonard thus affectionately spoke. She only said, however, in reference to what had preceded these last words:—

"I am certain you will do all you can to watch over my Lizzie. This thought keeps me from utter despair in leaving her. She will have poor little Willie to interest and engross her for a little while. In nursing and amusing him she may partially forget herself and her own sorrows."

"And you, my dear child, will try to be hopeful and patient in this sad matter—to believe that the hard discipline appointed for your sister, is good for her, *necessary* for her? Ah, believe me, there are those who suffer even more than poor Lizzie is likely to suffer from the fatal error of giving their young hearts to bad, unprincipled men."

"Mrs. Leonard," Sarah exclaimed, abruptly, "I want to know, if you will tell me, what special fault or sin Lizzie's husband commit-

ted while his father was alive and you and he living as mother and son together. I have other reasons besides those connected with what you said just now, for feeling sure he offended you gravely, and I have heard enough of his past doings to be prepared for almost anything."

"What good will it do you, my dear child," Mrs. Leonard asked, with a face of keen distress excited by Sarah's question, "to learn more of this young man's errors than you have already done? I think you are quite anxious and unhappy enough as it is in knowing that your sister's earthly happiness is committed to his keeping. I would prefer remaining silent on the matter you have inquired about, unless you can give me a sufficient reason for wishing me to speak of it."

"Pray pardon me," Sarah replied, perceiving at once the emotion she had awakened, "I ought to have reflected that the subject might be specially painful to you, and indeed I have no better reason for my question than

the fact that the imagination once excited on a particular point is apt to outstrip reality. I shall try to think nothing further about it."

"And so of course think all the more," Mrs. Leonard said, with half a smile. "No, my dear, I will not be even the innocent means of encouraging the wild flights of a young woman's imagination, for that is a faculty of which, I have, under certain circumstances, a peculiar dread. The reality in this case would have been little to make a fuss about—unfortunately such things are of daily occurance—but for its disastrous results. When I married Mr. Leonard, I had a young niece, an orphan, residing with me as my adopted child. She was pretty, innocent, enthusiastic, and good, in the ordinary meaning of this last word. Frederick was three or four years older than herself. They played together first, and Lucy soon learned to bow to every caprice and fancy of her tyrannical companion. She deemed him worthy of her entire homage and obedience; she worshipped him as girls

sometimes worship those of the other sex who trample on them even oftener than they caress them. Poor Lucy, however, grew up so pretty and graceful that caresses, after awhile, became tolerably frequent too, and both my husband and myself had not a shadow of a doubt that an engagement was distinctly understood between the young people. I did not like Frederick even then—his selfishness was, and always had been, so painfully apparent—but seeing how Lucy's tender heart clave to him, I did not dream of interfering in the matter. Once I asked her if she was quite sure of Frederick's attachment being equal to her own, and of his really intending to make her his wife. Never shall I forget the wondering look of those innocent, loving eyes, as they were raised to mine, while her lips spoke out the answer. 'Aunty, how could he talk to me as he does, how could he claim my whole affection, how could he leave his kiss upon my lips, if he did not regard me as his future wife? Would any man breath-

ing so injure, so insult a pure woman?' I knew a little more of the world than my poor Lucy, so I ventured to inquire again if these were all the proofs she had of her lover's ultimate intentions. Then the little head went up almost haughtily as she replied, 'None other are needed,' and I felt that for the time it would be useless to urge her further. I cannot tell you how long it was after this, not a month, I think, when passing through the woods one evening with Lucy, we came suddenly upon a pair standing in earnest conversation, with their backs towards us. They had not heard our approach, and I felt suddenly arrested by Lucy's strong gripe upon my arm. She had recognized them and was doubtless curious, only curious in that first moment, I believe, to hear what subject of mutual interest could be in course of discussion between Frederick Leonard, *her* Frederick, and Leah Ash, the daughter of a small tenant on the estate. So we both stood still, and in less than five minutes had heard

enough to seal my poor child's destiny for life. I cannot dwell upon the theme, Sarah. You would sicken over the details if I could give them to you. Lucy's mind went utterly astray under the surprise and horror of knowing that she had only been trifled with, that the love she clung to as her life had never even had an existence. We could not keep her at home; the case was much too bad for this. She has been in a private asylum from that time; and Robert and myself, since Mr. Leonard's death, have managed to pay the expenses. Frederick made a careless, insolent offer of a sum he said would be sufficient to keep her in a third-rate establishment, utterly repudiating the charge of being in any way answerable for her affliction. I need not tell you that this was declined, nor explain now why your brother-in-law is an object of more than common dislike and repugnance to me. Dear Lizzie has often wondered at the shabbiness of my rooms, and hinted at her wish of re-furnishing them. Judge whether I could

receive the value of a single shilling from the man who not only brought the saddest of all afflictions upon my poor harmless child, but who would have been content to have her put away anywhere, with paupers even, so that he might in no way suffer through her suffering."

Sarah had listened with many varied feelings, all of them painful in no common degree, to this melancholy story. When it was finished she lifted her tear-stained face, and said in a low voice:

"God help all those whom this cruel man has still power to influence!"

"We must never weary of praying that He *will* help them indeed," responded Mrs. Leonard solemnly, "and now, Sarah love, in dismissing the miserable subject, I must ask you not to mention anything to Robert of what I have told you. He looks upon his young cousin's affliction as a very sacred thing, and might not care to have even you acquainted with it."

Sarah did not think it necessary to repeat then what she had already heard of Miss Oliver's story from Mrs. Chester; neither did she venture upon a single inquiry as to the amount of cousinly regard Robert had entertained for Lucy. Her heart bled for all whom the poor girl's calamity had touched, and the thought of her own dear sister as the wife of him who had done the cruel wrong, was agonizing in the extreme to her.

Both Mrs. Leonard and herself were disinclined for ordinary conversation after this. They parted with expressions of the warmest esteem and affection, and hopes (only a little restrained on both sides from reasons that each kept secret) of meeting soon again under less depressing circumstances.

It was a noticeable fact, that during all their long confidential *tête á tête*, neither of them had mentioned, or directly alluded to, Mrs. Lumley Rogers.

CHAPTER X.

MORE THUNDER CLOUDS AT PENGARTHEN.

After her sister's departure Lizzie's spirits sank lower and lower every day. She had no longer the same motive for concealing how much she suffered in her husband's utter neglect of herself and devotion to her guest; and tears, sometimes of bitter anger, sometimes of sorrow only, became so frequent to her in her lonely hours that the fair cheek lost its roundness, and the soft eyes their joyous light. Mrs. Lumley Rogers could not be blind to the change in her little friend, but she thought it was Sarah's loss that weighed upon her

spirits, and did all in her power to soothe her under this imagined grief.

"You must take up science as I have done," she said to Lizzie, one day when Frederick had left them for a short time together, "you can't imagine how engrossing it becomes after awhile, and how entirely personal cares are forgotten during the hours of study and thought. Why will you never assist your husband and myself in our grand researches and arguments? I am sure he would be pleased to see you take an interest in intellectual pursuits."

Lizzie, smiling rather bitterly, replied—"Frederick considers me incapable of anything of the sort. Perhaps I am now. I ought to have begun earlier to cultivate my mind, when we first married, and I discovered how very much cleverer my husband was than myself. Sarah used to tell me I had better do so, and I fully intended to follow her advice—Ah me! how much I intended when I first came to Pengarthen. But I have

done nothing,—less than nothing, and now it is too late."

"You child, you child!" exclaimed Mrs. Rogers, unable to suppress a laugh at Lizzie's dolorous tone, "why, anybody to hear you would suppose you were an old lady with grey hairs and a crutch, and the weight of all the world upon your poor shoulders."

"We have all of us our troubles, I suppose," Lizzie answered, rather shortly (alas! she was fast losing her sunny evenness of temper), "and though mine might appear light to you, they are at least heavy enough for me, a 'child,' to bear, and I don't believe the pursuit of any science that was ever invented would make me forget them."

"Yet you have a splendid home, a fond husband, a legion, no doubt, of friends, and youth, health, and beauty. What more can you desire?"

(Mrs. Rogers was not behind the scenes, you see, or she would not so have spoken.)

Lizzy had not the very smallest intention

of making a confidante of the interesting widow, though even yet she liked her, and fully believed in her sincerity towards herself. She said, therefore, trying to assume a gayer, lighter tone:

"Perhaps I desire the impossible thing of being as accomplished and fascinating as Mrs. Lumley Rogers. Every person, I believe, is guilty of the childish folly of crying for the moon in one shape or the other—even you, it may be—"

She paused abruptly, less on account of the sudden flush that came and went like a meteor on her companion's face, than at the remembrance of a thought she had often had of late in connection with Mrs. Lumley Rogers and a moon Lizzie believed she was coveting.

"Yes, yes," said the widow, catching up the broken sentence, and laughing not quite so naturally as usual, "it is just because I can't have my beautiful calm moon, set so high in the heavens above me, that I have plunged headlong into science and literature,

and am just now taxing your husband's patience to the utmost in dragging him after me through labyrinths of mystery and wonder. I want you to come with us too, Lizzie. Heavy work though you may find it, I should scarcely think it could be heavier than the task of entertaining that intensely self-satisfied coxcomb, Edward Erskine, during every livelong morning."

Lizzie laughed now in good earnest.

"I entertain Edward Erskine! Why I never see him from the moment you and Frederick go to the library. We both perfectly understand that we are objects of dislike to each other, and so keep apart as much as possible. What made you think I entertained him?"

"Simply that when we meet at luncheon he always looks as if he had been delightfully entertained; and I did not give him credit for appreciating the charms of solitude."

"I don't know what he does with himself; it never occurred to me to conjecture. I saw

him one morning talking to Leah on the terrace, but I am sure she would not admit him to her rooms, nor encourage him to gossip with her anywhere; she has far too much self-respect and propriety of conduct. Poor Leah! I am afraid her mind is not at rest. She appears to me to grow thinner and whiter every day."

"She is a very remarkable looking woman, Lizzie. I do believe, though I am no coward, that if she lived with me I should be afraid of her. Why do you keep her in your house?"

"Strange," said Lizzy, musingly, "that nearly everybody warns me against Leah Ash, and yet to me she is all gentleness and goodness. I keep her however because Frederick wishes it, even while greatly disliking her. He is under obligations to her father."

Mrs. Rogers had received the same explanation from Mr. Leonard himself when she had once expressed her surprise at his wife's having sanctioned the admission of such a young and beautiful woman into her establish-

ment. She did not quite believe in it, but it was no concern of hers, so she quitted the subject now, with only the added impression on her mind that the honourable Edward's mornings *were* spent in the society of her friend's handsome housekeeper.

"But tell me then what you do with *yourself* during the long hours I am monopolizing your obliging husband?" she continued, recurring to the former topic. "I tremble even to think that I may innocently have condemned you to lonelinesss and melancholy. Indeed, indeed, Mr. Leonard assured me you were very happy and contented with his friend."

"Perhaps he thought so," said Lizzie, though her lip curled and the pale rose on her cheek flushed to deep crimson; "but I told you the truth about Edward Erskine, and Frederick might have known it had he taken the trouble to inquire. As for myself, I like often to be alone—when it is otherwise, I go and sit with Mrs. Leonard. She misses Robert as

much as I miss Sarah, and has not, I fancy, quite such good spirits as she had some time ago."

"You are very happy, Lizzie, in the warm, motherly affection of a woman like Mrs. Leonard. Do you know I never tried so hard to win a heart in my life as I have tried to win hers. It is a grave disappointment to me that I have not succeeded."

"Oh, indeed, she admires you exceedingly, and has spoken much in your praise. Robert said so to Sarah and myself the day he drove with us to Penzance to see my sister into the train."

Mrs. Rogers smiled rather sadly and unbelievingly:

"Anyhow, I have never advanced further than I advanced at that first interview. *Something* has closed her heart against me, and I might set up an opposition cry to a starling we know of, and exclaim dolefully—'I can't get in! I can't get in!'—Your sister

Sarah now sits triumphantly enthroned there. I wonder how she managed it."

"Their liking for each other sprang up naturally and at once—we were a very happy party," continued Lizzie, with an involuntary sigh; "in those first days after my illness, when Robert came down, and we four were always together."

"Robert will marry your sister," said Mrs. Rogers abruptly, so abruptly that Lizzie was quite startled, and turned round to find that her companion had risen with the last words, and was moving towards the window.

"I am certain there is no engagement or thought of an engagement between them at present," Lizzie said, with an impulse of generosity and kindness.

But the widow had grown tired of all this small talk, and was yawning, as wearily and listlessly as if she had not slept for a week, and was obliged to struggle hard to keep from dropping asleep now.

The very day after the conversation just recorded had taken place, Mrs. Lumley Rogers announced to her host that she was tired of books and magic, and study of all kinds, and that for the remainder of her visit she meant to be thoroughly idle, or at the most to ramble about the country with Lizzie, and enjoy the little remnant of autumn and autumn's sunshine.

Now, although this announcement was made carelessly, and with that air of smiling caprice which men are so ready to pardon in a pretty woman, Frederick Leonard did not for a moment doubt that a more serious motive was at the root of his fair friend's sudden decision. Was it possible that Lizzie had ventured to hint her disapproval of those long morning readings, or had suffered their guest by any means to discover that she was jealous of her?

The very idea that such might be the case, set Mr. Leonard's heart throbbing with rage and indignation; but as yet he only allowed

his very handsome face to express a natural blending of surprise and regret at what he heard, while asking if he might not plead for a mitigation of his sentence.

"No, indeed, I am quite in earnest," Mrs. Rogers said, in those syren tones which always appeared to be deprecating any anger or vexation her words might excite. "While Lizzie had her sister with her, my conscience was easy in neglecting her for science, but she is alone now, and I will permit nothing else to come between us. After all—" here she turned round and folded one of Lizzie's hands caressingly in her own—"After all, what can there be so interesting as the study of a young, pure, loving, bewitching creature like this wife of yours? I blush to think that my foolish whims should have robbed you of so many hours of her sweet society."

It would be difficult to say whether the husband or the wife experienced the most embarrassment in listening to this somewhat romantic speech of the fair lady seated at that

moment between them. Lizzie, however, only coloured, and kept her eyes bent on the ground, while Frederick grew pale, bit his lips, and seemed to have a hard matter to hold back some words that were trembling upon them.

"I hope," he said, at length, when he had grown a little calmer, "that I am not to be forbidden the honour and pleasure of attending you in the rambles you speak of—there are horses too at your command. May we not sometimes ride together?"

"Thank you; but, indeed, I like walking best when I am in the country; besides, your wife does not ride, and I belong to her for the brief remainder of my stay in Cornwall."

There was a dead silence for a minute or two after this, one of those awkward pauses which, under certain circumstances, fill each member of the group where they occur with the most uncomfortable sensations. To break it Lizzie said nervously (for she had the

clearest possible conviction that a storm was brewing): "Would you like a walk this morning, Mrs. Rogers? It seems as if it was going to keep fine, and the wind I know is in the west."

Poor child! To her just then it had a very easterly feel indeed.

"Yes, I shall be charmed," Mrs. Rogers answered, immediately, "we will go down to the beach. Mr. Leonard can please himself about accompanying us. I will get ready at once."

The husband and wife suddenly found themselves alone.

"This is your doing!" the former said, turning round upon Lizzie a countenance upon which a legion of evil passions seemed striving for mastery; "you have exhibited your most contemptible jealousy, your petty, despicable envy to a lady who honours you far too much in stooping to notice you at all. You have deprived me of the society of a refined, intellectual woman, because you grudged me—

meanly and basely—the very natural pleasure you saw I took in it. I have warned you before not to try me too far. I warn you once again. Interfere but the very shadow of a shade with my pursuits or my enjoyments, and I will send you back to the home I had you from, with as little compunction as if you were a dog that had bitten me. Do you hear? do you understand?"

Yes—Lizzie both heard and understood. It was not the first time she had listened to brutal language from the husband she had once deemed perfection. Perhaps in his present ungovernable anger his words were a little coarser and a little crueller than they had been on that former occasion so indelibly burnt into her memory; but in nature they were pretty much the same, and a second stab, though it should go deeper into the flesh, is less keenly felt than the first.

So the wife only held her hand tightly pressed over her heart, which was beating

almost too rapidly to permit of her utterance, and said very quietly:

"I am quite innocent of that which you accuse me of, Frederick, and as much astonished at Mrs. Rogers giving up her readings as yourself. Had I not better prepare for walking with her? she will be down again in a minute."

"And pinch some red into your cheeks, or get your maid to paint them!" he said, savagely. "It will be asserted next that I am the cause of your looking white and sulky. And, here, you—" (as Lizzie was hurrying away), "I shall not dance attendance upon you ladies this morning, so you will make my excuses to Mrs. Rogers, and tell her Mr. Erskine wants me to go and look at a horse for him."

Whether Lizzie pinched or painted her cheeks I am unable to say, but certain it is that they looked bright enough by the time she came under her friend's observation again, and her spirits were so unusually high that

Mrs. Rogers not unnaturally concluded it was all sunshine between the married pair, and half doubted whether she had not been a simpleton for giving up the readings, which, as she had truly said, helped her to forget so many of her personal cares and anxieties.

"I must make my peace with your husband by and bye," she said laughingly to Lizzie, as they returned from their walk; "men are all spoiled children, and cannot endure to be crossed in ever so trivial a matter. Mr. Leonard is no exception to the rule, but he has been so invariably kind and polite to me, that I would not willingly offend him. If he should be in the library now, do come with me and help me to beg pardon."

"I think you will manage that better alone," Lizzie answered, for besides her consciousness that Frederick would not give her a very warm reception, she had really no inclination on her own part to encounter those fierce eyes again just yet.

"*Shall* I go alone?" Mrs. Rogers said,

wishing Lizzie's face had been turned towards her at that moment.

"Pray do! Why should you not?" the poor little hypocrite asked, in a light, cheerful tone.

And the widow, really sorry at having vexed a gentleman who paid her such sincere, and yet, as she believed, justifiable homage, went slowly towards the room she had so often occupied with him, to find him and make her peace with him.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HIDDEN LISTENER, AND WHAT SHE HEARD.

THANKFUL beyond measure at finding herself once more alone, and with the unnatural strain taken off her spirits for a few minutes, Lizzie entered at the first open door she came to after Mrs. Rogers had left her—it happened to be the breakfast room—and sat down wearily and mechanically upon a low couch pushed back into a dark corner.

Now, for the first time since it had occurred, her mind reproduced with every detail of look and voice and gesture, the brief

scene she had been favoured with a couple of hours ago. She had succeeded in putting all the minutiæ of it from her during her walk with Mrs. Rogers, but it came back now she was alone with horrible accuracy and distinctness; (who does not know what that accuracy and distinctness is, in reference to any cruel episode in the past which, from time to time, *will* rush like a flood into the memory ?) and again and again she asked herself, as she twisted her poor little hands convulsively and nervously together—(was this to do instead of tears ?)—"Can the man I call my husband now, be the same man who once took me to his heart, and swore he could easier die than speak one unkind word to me!"

And then, because the trembling heart was so very weak and helpless, so desperately in want of some kind of comfort, Lizzie set her imagination at work to see if any excuse could be found for the last brutality of which she had been the victim, if any reasonable palliation could be discovered for the coarse

and cruel language that had been poured into her ears.

Was it temper only? Frederick, in his amiable moments, acknowledged himself to be a hasty-tempered man, and many such men would say things in their passion that they neither thought nor meant five minutes later. No doubt he *had* believed that she had been the cause of putting a stop to those interesting readings in the library, and being clever and intellectual himself, it was perhaps natural that he should take an unusual degree of pleasure in the society of so very clever and intellectual a woman as Mrs. Lumley Rogers. If that lady had been elderly and plain, Lizzie knew that she should have felt no sort of uneasiness about the matter; but then arose the pointed and inevitable query—if she had been elderly and plain, would Mr. Frederick Leonard have given himself the least concern about her? The wife thought not; and her weary mind, unable to find the smallest bit of solid ground

to rest upon, was struggling to throw off altogether the agitating suggestions that were crowding thick upon it, when rapid footsteps at the other end of the room caused her to lift her aching head from the pillow on which she had laid it, in time to see a male figure standing in the open doorway, and a female, who was already in the room, apparently daring him to come beyond.

This last was Leah, who, with burning cheeks and flashing eyes, still unconscious of not being alone, walked on quickly to the centre table and began arranging, in a vase that stood there, some flowers she carried in her hand.

Lizzie suffered her to finish her task, and then she spoke out her name kindly and encouragingly.

The house-keeper started; but after a moment's hesitation obeyed the call, and went towards the dim corner where her young mistress was seated.

It seemed as if the very sound of Lizzie's

voice had power to quell, in some degree, the excitement which Leah had been manifesting. The red died out in her cheeks, and the fire burned less fiercely in her eye, as she approached the little sofa. Still it was quite evident that the woman's feelings had been wrought up to an unnatural and unwonted pitch, and Lizzie's tone and manner were even gentler than usual as she asked, when Leah was standing close beside her:

"Was that Mr. Erskine at the door just now?"

"It was."

"I hope he has not ventured to insult or annoy you in any way, Leah? I am sure Mr. Leonard would be seriously displeased if a gentleman in his house could so far forget himself. I—"

Here Lizzie paused abruptly, for the curl on Leah's lip was too marked, too expressive of bitter contempt and something beyond, to escape her notice.

"Why do you look in that way, Leah?

What has Mr. Leonard ever done to incur the dislike you so plainly manifest towards him? It seems strange to me that you should wish to remain in a family for the head of which you have neither respect nor affection."

Leah appeared, by the convulsive movement in her throat, to be gulping down a very nauseous draught indeed—something to which gall and wormwood would be sweet and pleasant—she only said, at the end of the process:

"You were speaking, ma'am, of Mr. Erskine, were you not?"

"Oh, well—yes," continued Lizzie, too spirit-broken just now to insist on an explanation Leah was evidently unwilling to give—"I was asking you what his offence against you had been. You had just parted from him, and you were looking very angry indeed when I first saw you in the room."

"I had some cause to be angry, ma'am, though less with him, bad as he is, than with

that other who urged him on"—(here her excitement seemed to be mustering again in spite of herself)—"I *know* he urged him on. I heard it; heard every word one night on the terrace. The farmer's daughter was handsome enough to be worth the winning, especially as she would cost him little trouble, be an easy prey.—*Easy prey!* he said it; those were his infamous words. Yet he could have told a different tale were it not that lying is more familiar to him than truth. But his friend believed him; he had some idle time upon his spotless hands, and so he did me the rare honour to come and gossip with me in the gardens, or in my own room, and to tell me I was very fair. I might have dismissed him, it is true, at once. I might have thrown back scorn for his courtly politeness, contempt for his honied words; but I had a purpose of my own to serve, information, that he could give, to obtain, and, like a fool, I thought I could keep him at bay until all my object was accom-

plished. This morning he dared to exchange his usual guarded love-making for an insult that no true woman can ever tamely receive. He will not repeat it, or, if he does, he too shall learn—Good heavens, what have I done? —you are ill; you are fainting!"

"No, no," said Lizzie, who had indeed become white as a snow-drift and nearly as cold, "I am not going to faint, Leah, but you frighten me excessively in speaking as you do. I cannot understand you clearly. I think you are over-excited. Mr. Erskine's unpardonable conduct has disturbed your mind. He shall not remain in the house. I will speak to my husband; but you were wrong in admitting him into your rooms at all. In your position, a false one as you know, at best, you cannot be too careful. I wish from my heart, Leah, much as I like you personally, you would be content to seek another situation."

A perfectly indescribable expression came into Leah's face as her young mistress said

this—it would have been a wholly bad expression, but for a few tears that sprang to her still burning eyes at the same time.

"You may have your wish, ma'am, sooner than you expect," she replied, in a constrained voice, "but—forgive me, if I seem to speak too boldly—but I should be glad to see you happier before I go for ever."

"Why should it be for ever, my poor Leah?" asked Lizzie, keeping back her own tears with difficulty now, but deeming it best to turn the conversation to anything rather than her own unhappiness.

"I can only give you a woman's reason, because it will be," Leah said with pale lips. "I never expect to be happy anywhere—here least of all."

The natural inquiry—"Then why have you stayed so long?" was on Lizzie's tongue, but Leah's unmistakeable attachment to herself disposed her to be very tender over all Leah's feelings. She said instead—

"Leah, I have often meant to ask you why you do not go to church. It cannot be that there is any truth in what I once heard, concerning your having imbibed the principles of the lady who educated you. They told me this lady was an infidel."

Leah's eyes had been bent upon the ground while her mistress spoke. On the ceasing of the soft, gentle voice she looked up, and her face was calmer and more womanlike than it had been throughout the interview.

"If I beg you not to question me on this subject," she said, "it is wholly for your own sake. Though I stand towards you in the relation of servant, I love you with no common love, and I would not voluntarily pain or offend you for the whole world. If, just now, I risked polluting your pure ears with a tale that is scarcely less odious to my own, it was because I think the time has come to deliver you from a bondage that is as humiliating as it must be fatal. I mean the bondage

of continuing to love and cling to a man so wholly base, and dishonoured, and vile, as he you call your husband."

"Leah, how dare you? what do you mean? you are certainly mad!" exclaimed poor Lizzie, springing from her seat, and, with trembling limbs, standing white and wrathful before her husband's accuser. "Has all my indulgence, has all my partiality towards you secured me no better return than this? I should be utterly ashamed of you, Leah, but that I verily believe you are insane, and only fit, in your present mood, for a lunatic asylum."

It was an unfortunate locality to name just then, when Leah's long outraged feelings, having reached boiling point, were entirely beyond her will to control.

"I should be the second he has driven there if they put me in," she said, from between closed teeth, "and a sympathetic companion for poor Lucy Oliver. Oh, do not go," she cried, as Lizzie, growing paler every

moment, firmly believing her companion had gone mad, was attempting to pass her. "I must disabuse your mind of its present impressions, and release your kind and gentle heart from its present thraldom. Stay; if you will not believe me, ask Mrs. Leonard for the truth of Lucy Oliver's story, and ask that bad man whom I have just driven from me like a beaten hound, who it was that set him on to court the plebeian's daughter, and then, if you want further confirmation of his vileness, or of his falseness to yourself, ask the dark-eyed widow, some few hours later, what your husband has whispered to her in the library. Only do, do, for your own sweet sake, and the sake of all who care for you, open your eyes and cease to love Frederick Leonard."

"Let me pass—let me pass, instantly, Leah," said Lizzie, with as much dignity and sternness as her excessive faintness would permit. "I shall at once go to my husband and request him to give you your dismissal. Do not fancy I believe a word of what you

have been telling me—not a word; am I to pass or not?"

Leah seized her mistress's hand abruptly, kissed it passionately, and let one hot tear drop upon it. Then, without another syllable, she stood aside, and Lizzie had her will, and passed out.

* * * *

All honour to the wives who will believe nothing short of the evidence of their own senses against the husbands they have once taken "for better, for worse." All honour to the true hearts which, conscious of their own purity and faith, cannot admit the possibility of faithlessness and dishonour on the part of those who have sworn at God's holy altar to love and cherish them until death! That woman may be clear-sighted and shrewd, may have an extensive knowledge of the world, may be able, on all occasions, to take care of herself, but she is certainly not to be envied who will say, and often with a careless

laugh, to her female acquaintances, "I would not trust my husband a step farther than I can see him."

It was in a spirit altogether opposed to this, in a spirit of pure womanly trust and confidence, mingled with indignant astonishment and sorrow at Leah's extraordinary denouncements, that Lizzie bent her trembling steps towards the library, quite forgetful at the moment that Mrs. Rogers had preceded her thither, forgetful of everything but her determination to make Frederick clear himself, and send the mad creature, who had accused him back to her friends. Lizzie would never injure the woman to whom personally she felt so much indebted, but Pengarthen Hall was manifestly not the place for her, and at Pengarthen Hall she must not remain.

Arrived at the library door, Lizzie turned the handle quickly—every moment's delay in getting to her husband seemed an age to her—and she was about to push aside impatiently

the tall folding screen that barred her further progress, when a low, but distinct voice, or rather a word uttered by that voice, suddenly paralyzed all her movements, and chained her as effectually to the spot as if massive links of iron had been abruptly thrown around her.

For nearly five minutes that voice went on —soft, pleading, passionate, and complaining. Then it ceased, broke down, as it appeared to the breathless listener, from excess of emotion or agitation. There was a minute's pause— Lizzie felt as if the throbbing of her heart must be heard in the dead silence of the room. But soon this silence was at an end. Another voice found language, and the poor wife's breathing, in listening to the second speaker, became less torturing pain.

These were the words she heard now—

"Mr. Leonard, I have to crave your pardon for the exhibition of an unusual amount of dullness this morning. I think my brains must have gone wool gathering, occasioning

me in their absence to hear quite other words and see quite other looks than those actually addressed to me. I am sure you have really been speaking to me of your love and devotion to your sweet, innocent wife, who, indeed, is worthy of the best and purest homage a husband can offer to her. During all my stay beneath your hospitable roof I have been so convinced of this love and devotion on your part, that I, as a passing guest, accepted frankly and fearlessly the attentions which you as a gallant, courteous gentleman, seemed to find pleasure in lavishing upon me. You are anxious now to confirm the agreeable impressions with which I came, and with which I have remained hitherto at Pengarthen. Unfortunately, as I said before, my poor brains are absent without leave this morning, and so I have seemed to hear the strangest words that ever loyal gentleman addressed to loyal lady. You will agree with me that my health must be curiously out of order to account for this phenomenon; therefore, with your leave,

I will borrow one of Mrs. Frederick Leonard's carriages in an hour's time, and seek some quiet, salubrious retreat, where I can nurse and doctor myself into my normal condition."

The rustling of a silk dress which immediately followed the dropping of this firm, clear voice, appeared to excite some sudden, passionate gesture on the part of the first speaker as if it was his determined will that the wearer of the silk dress should not yet depart. Then came another volley of reckless, mad, and still more desperate words—all of them tending to strike unutterable anguish into the heart of the hidden listener, but amidst which these few stood out prominently and for ever alone.

"As for my wife, you *could not* seriously think I loved, with a man's strong capacity for loving, a mindless baby such as she is. I thought her beauty worth the sacrifice of my liberty, because beauty had been, till I awoke to something higher and better, my weakest

point. But I never loved her—never—*never!* and I swear to you now by all I ever held sacred" (alas, alas; what *had* this unholy heart ever held sacred in earth or heaven?) "I swear to you, I say, that I would give my whole possessions, with twenty years of my life to come, to be at this moment free again, for *your* sake."

Whether any reply at all was vouchsafed to words so flattering, and, if it were, in what ingenious terms it was couched, Lizzie was never likely to know. When another faint rustle of the silk dress announced a second attempt on its wearer's part to remove herself from the tainted atmosphere in which she evidently did not feel at home, the concealed listener effected a hasty retreat to the outer side of the library door. All physical weakness was gone or forgotten in the wild excitement of her present emotions, wherein mingled a sufficient sense of wrong, of shameful wrong, inflicted on herself, to rouse some angry as well as sorrowful passions, and to keep her,

an insulted and injured wife, from fainting yet under the exceeding bitterness of discovering that her husband's love had never been anything but a mockery or a fable.

In the midst of her giddy bewilderment, two thoughts shone out clearly in Lizzie's mind. One was that she must by any means escape meeting with Mrs. Lumley Rogers at present, and the second was that it would be impossible for her even to look into, much less bear the future, without advice and help from somebody on whose wisdom and tenderness she could rely.

Both these thoughts tended to ensure the same course of action; and in three minutes from the time Lizzie had closed that fatal door upon the inmates of the library, she was standing flushed, palpitating, wild looking, and almost breathless, in Mrs. Leonard's room.

CHAPTER XII.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

NOTHING was left untold. The time had come, Lizzie said, and Mrs. Leonard did not seem disposed to contradict her, when concealment on the subject of her domestic miseries was no longer possible if she was to live and bear them.

"For I cannot," added this poor, stricken child, with lips that grew paler and eyes that burned brighter as she went on. "I cannot even imagine how I am to endure the future, linked to a man whose character I am obliged to despise, a man who hates me and wishes me dead because he thinks I stand between

him and another woman. Oh! he cannot wish it as I wish it," she sobbed, breaking down suddenly, but even yet shedding no tears—"he will not pray for it as I shall pray for it, whether it is wicked or not. I do not know if it is wicked, and in this great, great misery I cannot care. God will listen to me and let me die. I am sure He will; the world has been too hard for me. I was not made strong and brave and enduring like some women. I was made to love and to be happy. I might have been tolerably good if I had remained happy, but misery such as this would make me wicked. I feel very wicked now, and so I should like to die before worse comes of it. But I shall not die yet, because I am young and healthy, and while I live I must still act and bear like other people. I don't know how to act, and I feel as if I could not bear. I want to hide myself from all the world, from him more than from anyone, and from her, though she spoke wisely, purely, and as

no light woman would have spoken. Don't think I am blaming her because I shrink from seeing her. I know she never dreamt of this. I know she cares no more for my husband than for anybody else's husband. I have known it, and trusted her entirely all along; but if my meeting her just yet could be helped I should be glad, very, very glad. I might feel wickedly towards her, and she does not deserve it. My head is dreadfully confused, as if I had got a blow which had stunned me. I am talking more than I ought to talk, but I must have spoken once, and I remembered that you had said long ago I was to come to you in any great difficulty or trouble as I would go to my own mother. I would not go to my own mother in this trouble, nor to Sarah, for it would break their hearts. It is because I think of them and my poor Willie, who will be here soon, that I want to keep up and endure for a little while. Now tell me, please, what I

am to do, how am I to act, in what way I am to meet this very dreadful trouble that has come upon me."

How like a child she spoke, even in the midst of her woman's anguish; how like a child she looked, as crouching, rather than kneeling, at the elder lady's feet, she sometimes laid her head upon her friend's knees, sometimes lifted it to the pitying face bending down upon her, but always with the same expression of utter helplessness in her own countenance dominating even over its white, touching despair.

It seemed very little that Mrs. Leonard was able to do in the way of counsel or assistance, now that she was so suddenly put to the test. Hitherto, indeed, she had scarcely said a word, scarcely done more than listen to the passionately sorrowful tale poured so rapidly into her ear, and with such apparent confidence in the sympathy it was exciting. An occasional pressure of her cool hand upon the burning forehead of the child

at her feet, an occasional term of fond endearment addressed to her in those calm, soothing tones which a hard-won victory in the world's strife had so tenderly modulated, an occasional kiss, imprinted, mother's fashion, upon the golden hair falling all loose and disordered around the hot, scorching face; these were as yet the only tokens Mrs. Leonard gave that she was entering heart and soul into the matter; and they certainly did not seem of a nature to help poor Lizzie in any effectual way out of her great difficulties.

But to that last piteous appeal, "What am I to do? How am I to act? In what manner am I to endure this dreadful trouble that has come upon me?" the elder lady replied, with somewhat more of energy and authority than she had hitherto cared to exhibit:—

"You are to do nothing yet, but leave yourself entirely in my hands. To attempt to walk while there is no strength, is only to ensure falling and fainting by the way. By and bye strength, *some* strength at least, wil[1]

return, and then you shall fight out your battle as bravely as you may. Only tell me, before your poor little head grows more confused, what, under the circumstances, would be the least painful for you to do in connection with your husband and the guest who will probably be taking her final departure in an hour or two. I think you said you shrank especially from at present meeting either of them."

"Oh, I do, I do; but how can it be prevented? I cannot think of any way. I dare not reveal to Frederick the discovery I have made; he would hate me more than ever; and why should I now speak to him about Leah and the shameful things she told me this morning? I have asked you nothing about Lucy Oliver, but there is no need. I believe it is all too true. So if I met my husband yet, I should have to meet him with a calm face, as if nothing out of the common course had happened, as if I still believed in his love, and honour, and truth. Ah, but I

should die, or go mad, in the effort to conceal what I know, to smile away the bitter, bitter pain gnawing at my heart. I want to hide from them all, to learn alone to look with steady eyes at this frightful thing which so appals me now. I never dreamt that in our beautiful world there could be anything so terrible and hideous for a woman to contemplate. What is it? I keep asking myself, as the vision flies from me a moment; and when it comes back," (here she shuddered as if some spectral horror had suddenly appeared before her), "when it comes back it is ten times more ghastly and loathsome-looking than it was at first. Oh, my head! What can be the matter with my head to-day?"

Poor wronged child! Head and heart were both failing her in this first sharp and desperate trial of their strength and power of resistance. But she was at least happy in having a wise, and good, and tender human arm to lean upon in her abject weakness. Some wives have to encounter the same trial

quite alone, and unless they have learned to look for divine sympathy and assistance, sad, indeed, in such an hour is their experience, and very painful the temptations that too often accompany it. Pity them, pray for them, you who have never passed through such deep and stormy waters!

With infinite tenderness and solicitude, and a very few soothing words, Mrs. Leonard placed her arm round Lizzie's waist and led her slowly to her own bed in the adjoining room. Then she mixed for her a mild, soporific draught, such as she took herself under any nervous excitement, and having with little difficulty prevailed upon the poor, tired girl to swallow it, she left her alone with curtains drawn close around her, and returned to write the following brief note to Mr. Leonard:—

"Your wife has been seized with sudden illness, an affection, apparently, of the head, in my rooms, and I have induced her to lie down and take a harmless sedative as pre-

liminary measures. I am sure, however, from my own personal experience of such attacks that absolute quiet will be for some days essential. If you will leave her with me, I will nurse her carefully, and should it be necessary, her own medical man can visit her here to-morrow. I cannot of course dictate to you, as her husband, but I do earnestly recommend that you make no attempt to see her until she is better."

Mrs. Leonard believed she knew enough of her step-son to be convinced he would think very little, care very little what became of his wife during the first paroxysms of his rage and disappointment on the subject of Mrs. Lumley Rogers. She did not indeed calculate on there being anything more serious in his present infatuation than in the many others which had preceded it, but she was quite aware that each of those had proved sufficiently engrossing at the time to render him sublimely indifferent as to what was being done or suffered by the whole residue of the human family.

Before despatching her note, Mrs. Leonard was enabled to add:

"Of course I have been informed, by a messenger from Mrs. Rogers, of that lady's contemplated departure this afternoon. I should otherwise not have proposed detaining your wife in my apartments."

The message from the widow had been a simple announcement of her intended flight from Pengarthen, with a request that she might come in about half an hour to take a personal leave of Mrs. Leonard. This latter, in returning her a kind permission, had communicated the fact, which she rightly supposed unknown, that Lizzie was with her, and suffering from sudden indisposition.

In much less than half an hour Mrs. Rogers, very pale, and with all her bright vivacity apparently frightened out of her, stood on the threshold of Mrs. Leonard's room, looking as if dubious of the welcome she was going to encounter.

"Where is Lizzie? What is the matter

with her? When did she come to you?"—she asked, rapidly and excitedly, the moment the customary greeting had been exchanged between Mrs. Leonard and herself—"I am so afraid she will feel hurt at this sudden journey of mine, but indeed I must get back to London immediately—the post, you know, came in late to-day; after I saw Lizzie. Is she in the other room?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Leonard, who was so seated that no one could pass to the bedroom without disturbing her from her place. "She is lying down, and I hope sleeping by this time. You must I fear be content to leave your adieux and excuses with me, for I have had some experience of these nervous attacks, and I know how much depends on absolute quiet in their earliest stages."

She spoke very naturally and calmly, and not in the least as if anything unusual had occurred. Mrs. Leonard had far too much delicacy of feeling to allow the smallest suspicion to appear that she knew what had

been going on during the last hour, or guessed the reason of the widow's abrupt departure.

But Mrs. Rogers was evidently restless and miserable on the subject of Lizzie's illness. She longed to ask more questions, to gain further particulars, but was deterred by something in her companion's face she was yet unable to read clearly. The two women had each something to conceal, and their interview could not fail to be constrained and uncomfortable.

At length Mrs. Rogers, whose excitable nature was writhing under the uncertainty to which it seemed she was to be condemned, rose suddenly from her chair, and advanced, as it were instinctively, a few steps nearer to the door of the bedroom.

"Mrs. Leonard, I don't think it could hurt Lizzie to see me for a minute, and I would not say three words to her. I beseech you not to hinder me from going in."

For Mrs. Leonard had now stood up also, and her slight, erect figure was an effectual

barrier against any further progress on the widow's part.

"I am sorry to disoblige you; but I consider this poor child my own especial charge. I promised her sister to watch over her as if she really belonged to me, and were that the case I would keep out all the world—her husband included—while she was suffering as she is at present."

"But a nervous attack, arising from any physical cause, is surely no such alarming matter in a girl of Lizzie's age," persisted the younger lady, her spirit of antagonism aroused by the steady opposition she met; "and I am no contemptible doctor myself, having studied medicine once as a pastime during a long illness. Oh, I wish," she added, becoming humble and earnest again, and with tears starting to her eyes—"I wish you would permit me to see her."

Apparently Mrs. Leonard was a little touched now, for her voice was softer and gentler as she said:

"I will ascertain if she is asleep, in which case, if that will content you, you shall come in for an instant and look at her."

"Thank you," Mrs. Rogers said, while the other, opening the bed-room door very softly, went in on tip-toe, beckoning in half a minute for her guest to follow her as cautiously.

Lizzie had fallen into a deep sleep. Unused to sedatives, the draught had immediately quieted the nervous system, and complete bodily rest was for the time accorded to her. But could the mind be sympathizing in any degree with this merciful physical repose? Was it possible for a mind even temporarily at rest to leave on every feature those tokens of distress and anguish, those indications that something more blighting and withering than years had swept remorselessly over their young beauty! Alas! it needed not the arms thrown in abandonment above the head, the hands clenched tightly together, the golden hair all tangled and pushed away anyhow, to

give relief to the fevered cheeks,—to convince the dullest gazer on that touching spectacle that no mere physical cause had produced the nervous attack under which poor Lizzie was suffering.

With an exclamation of horror and dismay, succeeded by an additional whiteness gathering over her own face, Mrs. Rogers stood for a moment silently contemplating the figure on the bed.

Perhaps, like Blue Beard's wife, she bitterly regretted having come into the fatal room at all, but, however that might be, she very soon turned to go, and as the eyes of her grave companion met hers, she said, in a half suffocated voice:

"God forgive all who intentionally or ignorantly have helped to bring this about. [illegible], in mercy to my present wretchedness soon hear of her."

Mrs. Leonard said gently, and holding in a soothing pressure trembling hand, that was perhaps

unconsciously stretched out to her. "And now, can I do anything to help you, to expedite your departure?"

"No, no, I thank you sincerely," the widow replied mechanically, for her thoughts were evidently not keeping the sober pace of her words—"I am quite ready, and I believe a carriage has been ordered for me. You will tell Lizzie I am gone.—Stay," she added, in a voice of yet deeper emotion, and returning suddenly to the bed—"We shall never meet again in this world, and I should like to kiss her before I go. I would not kiss her if even in thought I had wronged her," (this was in answer to a faint movement on Mrs. Leonard's part, which seemed to deprecate a second risk of disturbing her charge,) "but my conscience is as clear and unstained as her own, and so, as we have been friends till now, I claim my right."

She stooped down as she spoke the last word, and imprinted a long, lingering kiss, on the forehead of the sleeper.

Some ugly dream must have been disturbing poor Lizzie just at that moment, for a violent shudder convulsed her whole frame, and Mrs. Leonard was terribly alarmed lest she should be awaking.

The other never uttered a syllable after this. On a mind like hers, a simple, accidental incident of this kind, just touching the confines of that dim mysterious world of supernatural instincts, portents, omens, and such like, in which she had so often strayed for amusement, was exactly calculated to make a strong impression. She passed out of the room with the look of a person who has been wounded too deeply to care for speaking of his wounds, and ten minutes later Mrs. Leonard was conscious of an emotion of thankfulness in hearing the sound of carriage wheels bearing her late visitor rapidly from Pengarthen Hall.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RESULT OF DRINKING AT A ROAD-SIDE INN.

FREDERICK'S step-mother had been quite right in believing that he would concern himself very little just at present about the indisposition of his wife, or in any of the proposed arrangements in connection with it. He knew, of course, that nothing very serious could be the matter, or Mrs. Leonard would not have written so calmly; and in the brief glimpse his intensely preoccupied mind took of the subject, he thought it likely that Lizzie might have brought on a severe headache by brooding over the scene of the morning. She was a

little fool for doing it, and must bear the consequences. What was all this compared to *his* suffering, his mortification, his feelings trampled on and coldly insulted by the only woman in the world, he said to himself now, he had ever really cared for?

But until Mrs. Rogers was actually gone, until he had both heard and seen the carriage drive with her from his door, Mr. Frederick Leonard remained in some degree in possession of his senses. He had the fullest conviction up to that time that his guest would return to the library, and take at least a kind farewell of him, express some pity for the hopeless state in which she left him, offer him her warmest friendship, if nothing more, for the time to come. To this spoiled child of prosperity, this man of unparalleled selfishness, it appeared simply impossible that he should fail to obtain anything on which he had strongly set his heart. Why should Mrs. Rogers be offended and leave his house, because he had asked permission to worship her,

and had assumed that she entertained for him a regard of a more than ordinarily tender kind? Were not such Platonic attachments sanctioned in the world they both moved in; were they not inevitable in cases where the wife was mentally far below her husband's stature? Surely Mrs. Rogers must be large hearted and liberal enough to feel all this, and after her momentary surprise at his—perhaps too impassioned—avowal had subsided, she would return and allow him more fully to explain himself; return and promise to accord him, at the very least, the tenderest friendship she could bestow on any one who was unfortunate enough to call another woman wife.

But Mrs. Rogers, wilful creature that she was, had apparently taken a very different view of the whole affair, for she neither returned to the library, nor left any message whatever for the gentleman whose hospitable roof she was so unceremoniously quitting. Utter astonishment, mingled with incredulity (notwithstanding the plain evidence of his

senses), was the first feeling that entered Mr. Leonard's mind, on the rolling away of his wife's carriage with Mrs. Rogers and her belongings. Then succeeded rage, indignation, madness almost, and a fierce determination to follow the woman who had dared to scorn and rebuke him, and compel her to listen to him once more.

Ringing the bell with an impetuosity that broke the wire, he ordered the freshest horse in the stables to be saddled and brought round for him immediately. Then suddenly, as he swept his littered papers into a drawer, coming in contact with Mrs. Leonard's note, he seized a pen and wrote the following:

"If my wife is content to stay with you I am content also, especially as I have to go out and may not be home till very late—perhaps not at all to-night. Have half a hundred doctors if you think it necessary, but weak women like Lizzie cry out if their little finger aches. She wants a few real troubles to make her less fanciful. "F. L."

Mr. Leonard imagined that it would be easy for him to overtake the quiet pair of horses that were drawing the fair widow's carriage, long before they could reach Penzance, where he knew also that at the rate those horses would convey her, she would only arrive in time for the train leaving that town late at night. Great therefore was his disappointment, bitter his wrath and indignation, when, less than two miles from Pengarthen, he met the carriage returning empty, and learned that at a small posting village a little farther on, Mrs. Rogers had been so peculiarly fortunate as to obtain a chaise and four horses, which would enable her to catch the afternoon train for London, and of course render any further pursuit on his part, even if another chaise and four had been ready for him, simply ridiculous.

Mr. Leonard, however, chose to ride on to the village in question, where, dismounting at the posting-house—a miserably dirty, uncomfortable place for a fine gentleman like him-

self—he entered a dingy room, with white-washed walls and a sanded floor, and calling for brandy and water—(such brandy it was, too!)—he, for the first time in his life, drank till he was thoroughly and even brutally intoxicated.

Some stray gleams of autumn sunshine entering in at the dusty, uncurtained windows of that ill-conditioned apartment a few hours later, rested upon a male figure with flushed cheeks and disordered hair, stretched anyhow upon a rude wooden bench against the damp wall, sleeping heavily, and as gentlemen of his rank are not wont to sleep.

Yet a few hours more and the same individual, with physical sensations entirely new to him, with throbbing head and burning eyes, and a thirst that appeared as if all the waters in the world could not satisfy it, was galloping madly under the calm moonlight in the direction of Pengarthen Hall. It had never been anything but a hateful place to him, it would be doubly hateful now; but the hard

bench and the bad brandy had reminded this devoted worshipper of self that there were other inconveniences in the world besides the flight of prudish widows, and that bodily sufferings were, after all, ten times worse to endure than mental ones.

"Hallo, Ned!" he exclaimed, nearly riding over that gentleman in the long avenue (Mr. Erskine, it must be remembered, had met with a little feminine discourtesy that morning too)—"Did you think I had run off with the widow, and forgotten to take you into my counsels? Precious rude of me to leave you to dine alone, old fellow, but we'll make it up over a cool bottle of claret. I've been poisoned with some villanous spirit or other at a road-side inn, and must drink speedily or die. She's gone, you know, my dark-eyed enchantress, and for good, I'm afraid. Did you know it?"

"It's strange to me that she did not go before—after that puritanical fellow, Alleyne," retorted the Honourable Edward, who had his

own reasons for being in the worst possible temper this evening. "Anybody but you would have found out before now that she was over head and ears in love in that quarter. I wouldn't mind betting you twelve dozen of champagne, or even my new hunter, that we hear of the marriage in less than a month."

If Mr. Frederick Leonard had held at that moment a loaded pistol in his hand I am afraid his honourable friend would have been conveyed back to the house on a shutter. The bad brandy had certainly predisposed the rash imbiber of it to any deed which would, for the moment, bring relief to his injured and excited feelings. But as he sprang off his horse, with the apparent intent of doing some bodily harm to the offending guest at his side, a servant, happily for the latter (having heard the sound of voices), came forward into the broad patch of moonlight where the two were now standing, and inquired if he should take his master's horse to the stables.

This timely interruption changed in some

degree the current of Mr. Leonard's thoughts, and cooled the first heat of his passion.

Ned Erskine could not know all he had gone through that day, or he would never have tried to madden him by such stupid words as those he had just spoken. Robert Alleyne, of all men under the sun, to be preferred before him, and by a woman who was neither saint nor puritan! Yet women had been known to fix their affections on the most unlikely and extraordinary objects, and was not Mrs. Lumley Rogers the most wilful, eccentric, independent, original woman in all the wide world?

Next to this thought arose in Frederick Leonard's mind (not, indeed, for the first time, but with an additional intensity now that he had received the notion of a rival), a fierce desire that he were free, free to enter the lists against the man he had always hated, and woo honourably the woman who might not otherwise be won. Alas, for the poor wife

who had ceased to charm him, and who interposed now between him and the latest object which his eyes had looked upon to covet!

"Come, Ned," he exclaimed, turning abruptly after horse and servant had disappeared, and laying a yet unsteady hand, in peaceful instead of warlike fashion, upon the other's shoulder—"there's no need for you and me to quarrel even if such a marriage should come off, though I no more believe in it than I believe you will re-engage yourself to that girl you jilted. Come, old fellow, and let's order a fire in the library, for my teeth are chattering with cold or something else, and I feel as if a fit of the horrors was stealing over me. We'll have up some champagne and claret, however, to quench this diabolical thirst of mine, and as the womenkind have all deserted us—my wife is sick in the old woman's apartments, you know—why we'll just have things our own way for once, and make a night of it."

"I must go home to-morrow in any case," Mr. Erskine replied, though he did not appear to dislike his host's suggestion in the meanwhile. "My lady mother wearies of her son's absence, and Pengarthen is awfully slow just now; and in short, I tell you frankly, I must depart."

"You must do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Leonard, promptly, and with a momentary glimpse of his ancestral halls tenanted by himself and his wife alone. "You must come with me to Paris instead. We'll start to-morrow morning, and remain there till Christmas. At Christmas I will fill the house again, and you shall be here too. I swear it, Ned—and acknowledge that Pengarthen Hall can be otherwise than 'awfully slow.'"

He laughed loudly and excitedly as he said this; but louder and more excitedly in concert with his friend as the hours went on. For they did make a night of it. And the next morning, in spite of aching heads and

sundry other tokens that discretion had not presided over their revels, these boon companions set off in pursuit of fresh amusements and distractions to the brightest and gayest capital in the world.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE MEETING BY THE LAKE SIDE.

Lizzie did not require much nursing. She was still too young, and her strength, during her happy, healthy girlhood, had been too little tried, to make even her present bitter sorrow tell very rapidly upon it. She had heard of her husband's departure from home, on the morning succeeding the events narrated in the last chapter, without any perceptible emotion. He had sent Isaure, just before he started, to say he was going, and to know if his wife desired to see him. Lizzie had lifted her tearless eyes to Mrs. Leonard's face on receiving this message, as if entreating direc-

tion in a matter she was too helpless and hopeless to decide for herself; but Mrs. Leonard had only said, gravely, "Let your own feelings guide you, my dear child;" and so Lizzie, whose feelings just now were all arrayed against the husband who had deceived and wronged her, wrote a brief farewell in pencil, and declined the coldly proffered interview.

"I dare say you would have done differently," she observed to her friend, later in the day; "but then I am not good, like you; I never shall be, now; every hope of it is over. If I had seen Frederick I must have betrayed that I knew more than he thinks I know, and who can tell how the scene would have ended? I want to avoid any open change until Willie's visit is over; my poor Willie! he always loved me so dearly; it would break his heart to find out I was unhappy. Perhaps he will not come yet, and I shall have time to become familiar with—"

Here she shuddered, and, leaving her

sentence unfinished, covered her white face with her hands and remained thus, apparently buried in thought, for the rest of the afternoon.

Mrs. Leonard soon discovered that all that would be demanded of her in the way of womanly ministerings to the poor stricken deer who had come to her for shelter, was patience, just patience, and nothing else, with the grief that human sympathy could not reach, and which seemed, at times, too heavy for the weak heart and trembling shoulders on which it had been laid.

Laid in wisdom and in love, this good woman never for a single instant permitted herself to doubt, and yet even her faith was tried when she discovered by countless, unmistakeable signs, how poor Lizzie secretly rebelled against the form in which her affliction had been sent to her, how she presumed to question the justice of Heaven in putting this bitter cup into her hands, and how impatiently in spirit, if not in outward expression,

she turned from every suggestion concerning the readiness and all-sufficiency of Divine love to atone for the loss of that earthly affection on which she had once built such golden schemes of perfect happiness.

Not that Mrs. Leonard ever obtruded such suggestions upon the sick mind she would so thankfully have assisted in healing. She too well understood the resistless force of a grief in which human passions are concerned, to attempt, at present, anything of the sort—but in conversation or in reading (for Lizzie was quite willing to unite with her friend in any effort for driving away the maddening thoughts that haunted her), these suggestions, and others of a similar kind, would occasionally be brought to her naturally, and then she always plainly showed that they were productive of no consolation, but rather the reverse. How could she believe in the love of God, when He was condemning her to such utter misery? and having lost all that she had been accustomed to regard as essen-

tial to her very life, how could she turn in a moment and draw comfort from a source entirely new and strange to her?

And Mrs. Leonard had not a word to urge in opposition to all this, for even better than Lizzie, because taught by revelation, she knew that until the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters, chaos and confusion would remain, until Christ himself should lay his gentle hand upon that poor cold heart, not one throb of love towards Him would animate it or warm it into life.

For the first few days after Mr. Leonard's departure, Lizzie kept entirely to her friend's quiet rooms, seeing no one but the grave old waiting woman, who has been before mentioned, and whose stolid face expressed neither curiosity nor any other feeling that could render her occasional presence objectionable to the poor outraged wife, hiding her sorrow from the world.

For the first few days, as I have said, this desire to be hidden out of all human sight

which had been co-equal with the discovery of her husband's baseness, kept Lizzie a close prisoner in the place whither she had flown for refuge; but when Mrs. Leonard pointed out to her the injury her health would sustain from want of air and exercise, she began to move about the house again, and even, when the weather permitted (for it was growing cold and wintry now), to saunter listlessly and aimlessly into the gardens, where she felt as secure from observation as in the solitude of Mrs. Leonard's rooms.

One day, as she stood in a dull, dreamy mood (though, indeed, all her moods were pretty much the same now) gazing intently, as it appeared, into the still, cold lake, down which were slowly drifting hundreds of dead leaves from the woods above, her attention was abruptly arrested and her outward calmness disturbed by the sound of feet, and the rustle of garments immediately behind her.

Poor Lizzie! she had one face, one figure so constantly before her eyes, that she would

have been quite prepared, in turning round, to see the owner of that face and figure standing there beside her.

But it was only Leah Ash, looking excessively white and careworn, scarcely, indeed, less changed and miserable than the wife who owed to her the knowledge that had rendered the very light of day odious to her.

Lizzie did not, at the moment, remember this; she only remembered the other things which Leah had told her in reference to her husband, and believing them now as fully as she had then discredited them, she would have given a great deal to have been spared the present meeting. It was out of her power to avoid the sudden look of acute pain, the sudden recoil that came over her as she recognised the intruder on her solitude. Leah was quick to notice it, and tears gathered fast in her large, dark circled eyes—they must have wept much of late to give them that heavy, sunken appearance—as she seized

Lizzie's hands impulsively, and pressed her lips silently and humbly upon them.

"My poor Leah, what is the matter with you?" Lizzie said, touched, in spite of her own absorbing grief, at the distress she witnessed. "Can I do anything for you?"

"Only tell me," exclaimed Leah excitedly, and in a voice that sounded unlike her own, "only tell me that I have not been the cause of this, of breaking your poor heart, of robbing you of your youth and beauty, of opening a grave for one I would have died myself to make happy! Oh, I never dreamt that you cared for him in this way," she went on with growing recklessness, as Lizzie stood, in her dumb, tearless grief, beside her. "I thought if you once knew his worthlessness your love would cease, and that being free in heart, you would no longer suffer at every new instance of his lightness and infidelity. Oh! how can you, so pure, so good, so innocent, so guiltless of a thought that angels

might not read—how can you continue to cling with fondness to such a man, whose death" (here her voice dropped a little lower) "would be the most merciful and blessed thing that could happen to you."

"Hush, hush, Leah!" exclaimed Lizzie, with a shudder, and an instinctive withdrawal of her hands from the clasp in which till now she had suffered them to remain. "If you talk in this wild way I shall send you from me, not only for the present, but for ever. Be content in learning that I do not for a moment blame you for anything I may be enduring. It must have come, sooner or later, though why or how so much should be known to you I cannot guess, and I do not ask. If you are disposed to act according to my wishes and earnest advice, you will leave Pengarthen as soon as its master returns. I cannot say when that will be, but, probably, before Christmas. My good Leah, I am grateful for your affection for myself; I be-

lieve firmly in its sincerity, but you mistake the means of lessening my troubles, and the knowledge I have of your animosity towards my—towards Mr. Leonard" (her face flushed painfully as she named him) "renders your continued presence here objectionable to me. Will you think seriously upon this, and act upon it within the next few weeks?"

"If you bid me go, I will go," said Leah, mournfully, though a little proudly, "but if you understood the depth of my love and devotedness to yourself, you would ask me to stay, though you might choose never to look upon me again. I know you have a warm, true friend in Mrs. Leonard, but even she would not do for you what I would, for besides another reason which I will not name, she does not love you as I love you; she has her son, and she has her duties, and she has her God, while I have but you—my mistress, my superior—whom, I suppose, I ought only reverently and at a great distance to es-

teem and honour—I have but you, I say, to love in all the wide earth, or in all the wider Heavens! Will you send me from you?"

Under different circumstances, the wildness and vehemence of Leah's manner, as she spoke these strange words, would, no doubt, have frightened Lizzie, and impelled her, as quickly as possible, to withdraw from her society; but a week of anguish, such as she had passed, had in some senses dulled her faculties, and predisposed her to receive most things with an indifference that was very foreign to her usual character.

She only said now, in answer to Leah's impassioned appeal—

"I may not, if I would, send you away on my own responsibility—but if you went voluntarily, I should, perhaps, be held blameless in the matter."

Her coldness seemed to have no effect in quenching Leah's warmth—

"I cannot go voluntarily," she rejoined, "while I think you are dying on account of

your love for that man, who has crowned all his other sins in making you his wife. If I could once see you delivered from this thraldom, see you separated by an impassable gulf from the women his lying arts have power to beguile, I should rest in peace; I should—"

"Stop," cried Lizzie, roused at last to some demonstration of the passionate and bitter feelings that had probably been raging in her heart ever since Leah's sudden appearance brought those terrible memories vividly before her. "Stop, and take from me the only return I can offer you for the unaccountable affection you profess for me. Take the confidence I have given to no other human being, that I never shall give to any other as long as life shall last. I *have* ceased to love my husband. It is not only his character that I despise, but the man himself that I detest and shrink from. Now you have the truth, the fearful truth, which has even more to do with my wretchedness than the causes that have made it the truth. Dear Leah, re-

spect this confidence, as if it had been given you from a death-bed, and let us part. I will say no more as to the future, except that if you really care for me you must not seek to see me again."

She was so agitated (probably at the effort it had cost her to show the deepest of all her wounds to Leah) that the last words were uttered with difficulty, and it was easy to see that her knees trembled under her as she began to move from the spot where they had been standing.

Leah's arm was round her in a moment.

"This little service you may at least permit, for the last time," she said, imploringly, and when Lizzie yielded and walked slowly on, supported by her companion, Leah's face, hidden from her young mistress, assumed an expression it would have puzzled the cleverest physiognomist to read. Only he would have detected two unmistakeable feelings, blending with many less intelligible ones, in that ex-

cited and remarkable countenance—and these two were gladness and determination.

The mistress and servant parted at the hall door, and Lizzie, returning to her friend, if possible more sad and hopeless looking than when she went out, said not a word of the interview by the lake side.

That same evening, when the twilight shadows were gathering, and Lizzie, weary apparently of her long, melancholy gaze at the dull prospect from the window by which she had been seated, was moving to a place reserved for her by the cheerful fire, Mrs. Leonard suddenly asked her if she would like to go out.

"Go out this cold night?" was the astonished reply, accompanied by a shiver that proclaimed how little satisfaction the idea afforded—"Wherever could we go?"

"I am going to the village to attend a meeting held every week amongst some poor people—poor as regards worldly possessions,

but rich in faith and in all that constitutes true wealth and true happiness—will you come with me?"

"I don't know," Lizzie said, hesitatingly, her sick mind turning from everything that seemed to demand effort on her part. "I am afraid I should be only an intruder amongst you all, and I never was at a meeting, as you call it, in my life. I should not know what to do—and yet it will be terrible spending a long evening alone; I cannot read, I cannot work—"

"So you had much better decide on coming," rejoined her friend, who was indeed bent on gaining her point—"There will be nothing for you to do, unless your heart prompts you to unite in the prayers or in the singing. And at least the whole thing will be a novelty to you."

Lizzie felt it to be so, when, after a long cold walk to the very far end of the village, they turned down an exceedingly narrow street, where the houses on either side ap-

peared half in ruins, and stopping before one of the worst of these, with no light in the lower window, Mrs. Leonard opened a door and bade her companion follow her carefully, for fear of stumbling, up a nearly perpendicular staircase, that was more like a ladder placed between two walls, than what it professed to be. At the top of this original flight of steps a very dim oil lamp was burning, and by its feeble glimmer the two ladies were enabled to climb without accident to the room or barn it was assisting in illuminating. A tolerably large, square, white-washed apartment, with a few rude beams running across the ceiling, some still ruder and very uneven planks of wood constituting the floor, and for furniture about thirty long benches placed at regular distances all down the room, with a lamp abutting from a high bracket against the wall for the accommodation of each five of these—such was the primitive temple in which Mrs. Leonard's humble friends met every week for prayer and praise, and to

which she had judged it well to bring the poor child, whose weary heart she yearned to deliver, even for one short hour, from the contemplation of its own grievances.

When they went in, some fifty or sixty persons, chiefly very old men and women, were assembled on the benches, looking grave, composed, and expectant.

Lizzie thought at first they had been waiting for Mrs. Leonard, and that her arrival would be the signal for the service to begin, but in this she was speedily undeceived, for beyond a friendly nod of recognition, no particular notice was taken of the "lady's" entrance, and, once seated, the fact of her being there amongst them, or of Lizzie's being there, though she was a stranger in the place, appeared to be quite forgotten. By and bye a few more of the same class of persons climbed up the ladder, and took their seats in silence, and last of all a very young man, evidently no richer or more exalted in rank than his brethren, but with a

calm, sweet countenance, came in and took his place behind the little deal table that held the oil lamp at the top of the stairs.

There had been a very faint movement amongst the congregation on his entrance, but in a moment all was hushed to the most profound stillness, as he lifted his hand and said, in a solemn, earnest voice:

"Let us pray!"

Up to this time Lizzie had been disposed to look coldly, if not altogether disapprovingly, on the whole affair. Educated as a member of the Church of England, she had received some vague notions, that any public meetings for divine worship in buildings not consecrated by a bishop, were unauthorized and wrong,—also that uneducated and illiterate men had no right, under any circumstances, to lead the prayers or praises of a congregation. But before this uneducated and illiterate man had spoken for five minutes, she was constrained

to modify her opinion, to admit, that whatever else there might be lacking in his case, he had received the spirit of prayer and of supplication, and was pouring it out in a manner as new as it was affecting to her.

Affecting because he seemed, by some marvellous instinct, to know the trials that were weighing her to the earth, and to be asking for the comforts and the consolations that should lift her weary, aching, and at present unwilling heart, to Heaven. As the prayer went on, she became more and more impressed, more and more drawn out of herself, and raised into a purer atmosphere, where even her bitter sorrow, looked at from the heights, took a less formidable shape, and dwindled to its earthly proportions. As the fervent pleader for Divine blessings said:

"We may well endure our light affliction, which is but for a moment, *if* we have reason to know that, because we are saved through Christ, this affliction is working out for us a

far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory!"

When the prayer was ended they sang a hymn, that sweet hymn of Wesley's, which Lizzie had never heard till now, beginning:

"Weary souls that wander wide
From the central point of bliss,
Turn to Jesus crucified,
He of grace the fountain is."

There was no great harmony in the voices that sang, little or no knowledge of music even amongst the youngest of the singers, but Lizzie's ear was not shocked by the discordance that greeted it, for she seemed to have become linked in some mysterious way to the hearts of the people around her, and the utterances of these simple hearts she doubted not were at least sufficiently harmonious to reach the Universal Father, looking down from the bending heavens above them.

More praying and more singing succeeded, and the whole was wound up by a brief, earnest blessing, pronounced by the young

man or "minister," who was evidently the leader of the little flock. After this the congregation dispersed, and Mrs. Leonard, finding the night had become very dark, accepted the offer of a respectable middle-aged man, who had been of their number, to walk with his lantern beside Lizzie and herself to Pengarthen.

Except a kind inquiry or two as to whether she were sufficiently protected from the cold, the elder lady made no observations to her companion during their walk home. She was busy talking to their obliging escort on subjects relating to himself and to his family, and thus Lizzie was left at full liberty to meditate on what she had seen, and heard, and felt, and to decide as to whether it was her imagination or her heart that had been touched by the novel scene in which she had played a part.

Anyhow she had shed tears to-night for the first time since her great trouble came upon her, and Mrs. Leonard, who had seen these

tears, thanked God for them, and took heart of hope.

"What sect do those people belong to?" Lizzie asked, and it was the only question she did ask at that time, in reference to the meeting she had attended.

"They call themselves simply 'Brethren,'" Mrs. Leonard said "and as far as all those you saw to-night, and who are in the habit of assembling in that humble room, are concerned, I believe they are brethren indeed, not only of each other, but of the Master they seek to follow. I esteem no privilege greater than that of occasionally worshipping with them."

From this night there was a decided change in Lizzie's outward manner, and Mrs. Leonard, writing soon after to Sarah, added, for the anxious sister's comfort, these encouraging words:

"I firmly believe this poor, tried child, over whom my heart yearns scarcely less fondly than your own, has at length detached

her grasp from the broken reeds of earth, and is clinging with a timid but an earnest hand, to the staff that will never fail her. I cannot say she is cheerful yet—that would be too much to expect—but her aspect is losing that heavy, hopeless expression, which was beginning to alarm me, and those strange fits of shuddering, as if she saw some painful, repulsive vision, come over her much less frequently. Also she will occupy herself voluntarily now with work or reading, and I think there could not be a better time than the present for her brother to be sent to her. As yet we have had no news from Mr. Leonard, but as Lizzie never mentions his name, I cannot tell whether she is annoyed or thankful at this silence. He will certainly be here for Christmas, and I cannot disguise from you that I look forward to the next meeting of the husband and wife with deep anxiety. I hear through my son that Mrs. Rogers has not returned to her own house, nor been heard of at all in London.

"Dearest Sarah, I need not urge you to join with me in praying earnestly that the clouds at present hovering over some we fondly love may roll away and leave, at least, a calm and stedfast, if not a brilliant sunshine."

The result of this letter was the arrival, within a few days after it had been written, of Willie and Kitty Anstruther at Pengarthen.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HUSBAND'S RETURN.

A week of her young brother's society, requiring as he did, on account of his invalid state, all the care and nursing the most anxious love could bestow, did more for Lizzie in the way of weaning her from her own griefs than perhaps anything else at that time could have done. Willie, her darling Willie, the playmate and companion of happy days gone for ever, was so much worse to all appearance than she had expected to find him, that the loving sister, half alarmed at the responsibility of having the sole charge of him, devoted her whole time, her whole ener-

gies, and, as far as she was able, her whole thoughts, to this one willing duty, from the moment he came beneath her roof. As for Kitty, she was left pretty much to her own resources, and the young lady growing weary of rambling over the old house, or of meditating amongst the leafless trees of the shrubberies, voted Pengarthen Hall an exceedingly dull place long before the first week was ended, and teased her sister every day with inquiries as to when Mr. Leonard, or "Frederick," as she chose to call him, would return.

It was, probably, something in Lizzie's face or voice, each time these questions were put to her, that first aroused a suspicion in Willie's mind that her married life was not quite the paradise her early letters, both to him and to the others at home, had painted it. Hitherto he had accepted the common excuse of ill-health as an explanation of the very great change he could not but perceive in his beautiful sister, but now he began to have other

thoughts, and to watch narrowly and anxiously for every sign that might confirm them.

One morning, when Willie and Kitty had been about ten days at the Hall, and when a faint bloom was beginning to re-appear on its young mistress's faded cheek, the letter bag brought something that, in a moment, changed that cheek to more than its former whiteness, and set the little hands trembling almost too much for the work they had to do.

"Oh, just look at Lizzie!" exclaimed pert Miss Kitty, who, having no correspondence of her own, was at liberty to watch what was being done by those who had—"she's so pleased at getting a foreign letter that I don't believe she'll ever break the seal—there now, she's torn that thin, blue paper, and won't be able to read half the pretty words inside. Make haste, Lizzie, do, and let us hear when Fred is coming home."

"Hush! you chatterbox," said Willie, in a tone that was harsh from one so invariably

gentle; "and as you have finished your breakfast, run up to my room, and find me those cough drops the doctor sent last night."

Kitty pouted, but obeyed, for no one ever thought of refusing to do anything for poor Willie; and then the brother and sister were alone.

"Thank you, dear," Lizzie said, crushing her husband's short letter in her hand, and going round to where Willie sat. "Kitty does not mean it; but she is a little teasing sometimes."

Willie leant back in his chair and kissed the sweet, sad face that was now bending over him. His own had an unwonted flush upon it, as he said:

"My darling, if this man does not make you happy, I cannot stay to see it. If I were older and stronger, Lizzie, he should account to me for every tear he may have made you shed; but as it is, sick, weak, dying, I should only suffer with you; and the powerlessness

to help or prevent would kill me outright. When do you expect him home?"

"Soon—in a few days now," Lizzie replied, with a tightened breath, for though tears just then would have been an unspeakable relief, she was resolved to keep them back, at any cost, for her brother's sake; "but, Willie love, you shall not see me unhappy; and you must not talk of leaving me yet. You know you have felt much better since you came here, and mamma is so glad, and we are all so thankful, and—and, darling Willie, you are a greater comfort, a greater blessing than you can possibly imagine to me."

She hid her face on his shoulder as she spoke, and now he could only kiss the golden hair—less glossy and more simply braided than it used to be—as he whispered in tender, mournful accents:

"My dearest, I will stay with you then, at any cost of pain to myself—but will Mr.

Leonard bring friends with him, or come alone?"

"Not alone," the wife answered, strangling the bitter sigh that would accompany the thoughts her husband's letter had suggested. "He bids me prepare beds for at least half-a-dozen ladies, and about the same number of gentlemen. These too will be chiefly foreigners—utter strangers to me. Mr. Leonard says he means to have a merry Christmas to atone for the dull time he has had here in the Autumn. However, dear," she added, by way of consolation to her invalid brother; "I must make them all understand that the greater part of my time belongs to you, and that you are in no state or humour to join in their revels."

As Kitty came into the room at this moment, the conversation was dropped, and Lizzie, leaving her to learn the news from Willie, went with a slow and heavy step to show her husband's letter to Mrs. Leonard.

"This is rather worse than I expected," said the latter, as Lizzie took from habit, or because she felt suddenly weary, the little stool at her friend's feet. "I am afraid you will be sorely tried with so many people to entertain just now—French people too, and possibly not even the best of these. Lizzie, my child, do you feel that you have strength and courage for it?"

"Not this morning, certainly. The thought of what may be before me is pressing like a dead weight on my heart. I feel as if I could willingly give twenty years of my life to escape from it all, to hide in some quiet spot where, perhaps, I might learn to devote myself to others as you do, to love and care for the things which are not of this world, to serve God humbly and faithfully until it should be His pleasure to call me to a home of rest for ever—Ah, what idle visions," she continued, in an almost wailing tone, pressing her hands tightly upon her eyes as if to shut them out—

"Such things are not to be for me. God does not want my poor service, will not accept my tardily offered duty, leaves me in the midst of a world and in circumstances where nothing is possible to me, but suffering and complaining."

"Lizzie," said her friend, kindly, but very gravely, as she laid her hand upon the storm-bent head: "I told you once that if ever you really desired to serve God, He Himself would *choose* your work for you. He *has* chosen it now, and your part is only to submit, and daily, hourly, to seek His guidance. Your husband is still a poor erring, sinful wanderer, living without God and without hope in the world. You, my child, however weak, have been called into the fold, and are therefore privileged to ask of the good Shepherd all the help and all the assistance in any appointed labour which your weakness and ignorance may require. Take courage, therefore, and go on, through all obstacles, till you win to

truth and virtue and Heaven the soul committed to your especial care. *This* is your work."

"*This* my work!" came out at length from the pale lips of the astonished listener, while one of those mysterious shudders, that Mrs. Leonard had rarely seen of late, passed like a chill wind over her. "You might as well tell me I was appointed to build alone another tower of Babel. Why, even if my husband cared for me, as he once professed to do, I should not have the slightest influence over him. As it is, judge for yourself."

Mrs. Leonard opened a Book on the table beside her, and pointed silently to these words:

"With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible."

So Lizzie, whatever she felt, said nothing more then, but went away to her daily duties, trying very wisely, but not very successfully, to act up to the scriptural injunction which bids us take no thought for the morrow, but

leave the morrow to take thought for the things of itself. That dreaded morrow, however, came all too soon, and if Lizzie, while her husband was yet absent, felt that the building of the tower of Babel would be a less difficult task than that of leading him to repentance, still more after she had seen him was this conviction impressed upon her mind. In their very first interview, the wife was conscious of some change in her husband which she was unable to understand, some moral deterioration which exhibited itself in his outward aspect, and marred, in a great measure, that charm of feature and outline that had so fatally captivated poor Lizzie's girlish eye. She had yet to learn that he had taken to habitual drinking, and thus opened the door to the last and deepest degradation into which a man can fall. That fiery brandy imbibed so recklessly at the little country posting-house had apparently circulated like poison in his veins, creating a thirst for stimulants that had never since been assuaged.

But at present Lizzie knew nothing of the cause; she saw only as an effect that her husband had become less of a gentleman than he had been before, that his grace of manner, his softness of voice, his refinement generally were altogether gone, and she drew the very natural conclusion that he had been associating with persons of an inferior rank to his own, and that they had dragged him down to their level from which he would probably never again rise.

Nobody except his sworn ally, Edward Erskine, came *with* Frederick Leonard to Pengarthen; but some of the invited guests were to arrive the next day, the remainder in time for Christmas.

"And you will have to rub up your French," he said to his wife, as he was carelessly giving her this information five minutes after he had been in the house; "none of these fellows can speak a word of English, and most of them are coming on purpose to have a look at you. Ned, there, must have been giving them a

flaming account of your personal attractions, for I swear I never told them a word about you, and yet, '*pour faire la connaissance de votre belle jeune femme*' were the words that accompanied the acceptance of every invitation I gave—to the men, of course, I mean, for I won't pretend that the women are coming on your account—eh, Lisette," (with a loud laugh) "you don't expect that, do you?—but what in the name of patience are you looking so sulky about?"

Lizzie did not intend to look sulky—she thought indeed that she had schooled her features into admirable order that morning—but it was quite impossible, with her shrinking delicacy of mind and feeling, that she could smile pleasantly while listening to such a speech as the one just made to her.

"I am not sulky, Frederick," she replied, as calmly and gently as she could, "only I am vexed that any one should be coming here on my account. I am not at all calculated for gay society; I never was, and now less even

than formerly. You know, as well as I do, that I could not hold the most trifling conversation in French, and, besides everything else, I have my brother Willie here now—you must remember you gave me permission to ask him—and he is far too great an invalid to endure the fatigue of general company. While he remains I should not like to leave him much alone."

"Oh, Willie be hanged!" exclaimed this courteous gentleman, almost before his wife had finished her sentence. "It isn't because I was good-natured enough to let you have a sick boy in the house, that I am going to submit to the derangement of my own plans. A pretty thing, indeed, to tell all these charming ladies and merry gentlemen when they arrive, that my wife is too busy to entertain them. Let the old woman come and look after your brother if he wants looking after; it's quite in her line. Anyhow, *you* can't be spared while my friends are here, and as for your French, there's de Vigny, a capital fel-

low, and in every respect a lady's man—he'll be delighted to give you lessons. He had been teaching an English girl, just for his own amusement, you know, before we made his acquaintance. I say, Ned, tell my wife what a regular brick de Vigny is, and how much she will like him."

Mr. Erskine, thus appealed to, looked up languidly from a newspaper he had taken possession of on his entrance (Frederick had chosen to have him present at this first interview with his wife), and said Monsieur de Vigny was certainly a very agreeable and accomplished man, but he was not so sure that he would please Mrs. Leonard. He was rather inclined to think otherwise.

"Then you must be a greater fool, Ned, than I took you to be," retorted his friend, with a still smiling countenance, "for you ought to have learned by this time that my wife and myself have only one pair of eyes between us. I use them first, of course, the husband being the head of the wife, and then

I lend them to her; so that by these means I ensure her seeing everything as I have seen it, and avoid any chance of a difference of opinion. When you marry I advise you to begin upon the same principle, for I have heard that there *are* troublesome, rebellious women in the world, and a troublesome, rebellious wife must be the very—"

"Frederick," interrupted Lizzie, showing by her unnaturally pale face how all this was trying her, "I wish, while your luncheon is being prepared, you would come with me to be introduced to Willie. You have never seen him, you know," but here her voice a little broke down, as she remembered how fondly and proudly in the days of her engagement, and even in the earliest of her married days, she had used to picture the first meeting of her husband and this darling brother.

"*Must* I be introduced to this interesting invalid?" asked Frederick, making a wry face, and retaining his lounging attitude upon the sofa, "upon my word, Lisette, you come down

rather hard on a man the very first minute of his return home. Can't you say I've been walking a fever hospital for my moral improvement, and am afraid of bringing him infection?"

When both the gentlemen had done laughing at this excellent joke, Lizzie pleaded again:

"You need not remain five minutes with him if it is disagreeable to you, but I think appearances require that you should submit to the introduction. Kitty is with him, too, and quite impatient to see you."

Poor Lizzie! she was so tremblingly anxious that her brother should not find out how very serious was the disunion between Frederick and herself that she did not reflect on the indiscretion of bringing the vain little Kitty prominently into notice, not at least until her thoughtless words had been uttered.

"Kitty here?" exclaimed Mr. Leonard, jumping up and looking quite animated in a moment, "oh! how could I be so stupid as

to forget that I had made that the condition of your having Willie! You see, Ned, how beautiful and entire is my wife's obedience! Well, come, as there's some amusement in prospect with her small, queenly ladyship, I don't mind going and saying, 'how d'ye do' to the young gentleman. You must, however, in return for this concession, Lisette, give me up Kitty for the rest of the day. It's too cold for riding, or I'd put her on the pony Fanny Clare used to mount; but we'll teach her to play at billiards. By Jove! we'll have some fun this afternoon, Ned. Come, Lizzie, let us get the cold bath over at once. I am not a coward in most things, but I do confess to a mortal horror of sick people."

Lizzie, struggling violently with all the miserable, indignant, rebellious emotions that every fresh word her husband spoke excited, but determined for Willie's sake to keep outward peace if possible, led the way to her own warm and cheerful dressing room, which she had given up for the invalid's use during the day.

The noisy and demonstrative welcome bestowed by Miss Kitty upon her newly arrived brother-in-law, was so far agreeable to her elder sister, that it prevented Willie from noticing, as he might otherwise have done, the cold carelessness of her husband's address to himself. He had not expected a vast amount of friendliness or cordiality; and except as it might affect Lizzie, he was very indifferent about the matter. For her dear sake he spoke kindly and gently to the relative she had given him, and refrained from telling her how relieved he felt when, after a sojourn of five minutes or so, Mr. Leonard left the room.

Left it with the smiling, dancing Kitty, who was enchanted at the idea of learning to play at billiards, and who wondered, but not long enough to interfere with her enjoyment, why Lizzie's face had been so grave and sad, as Frederick had called out in a laughing voice before he closed the door:

"Mind, I shall keep you to our bargain, and not allow the slightest interference with my wishes in reference to this young lady."

CHAPTER XVI.

THROUGH THE FIRE.

THE days that followed were more utterly miserable, more utterly trying, more utterly distasteful to poor Lizzie in every way than her imagination, even in its most gloomy and excited moods, had pictured them while they were yet in the future. From what class of Parisian society Mr. Leonard had selected his new acquaintances she was quite unable to decide. Her very imperfect knowledge of the language, her total ignorance of what constituted good breeding or was admissible amongst persons of birth and refinement in France, made it

impossible for her to pronounce a conclusive judgment on the guests assembled beneath her roof and whom she was expected to entertain. But one thing was very clear, clear to Lizzie's instinct even more than to her reasoning or observing faculties, and this one thing was that the people she was daily told to please, to honour, to find amusement for, were people that she would, if left to herself, have shrunk away from and avoided, without being able to explain even to her own satisfaction why she did so. The ladies were all of them married and had their husbands with him—so far they could challenge the remarks of the whole, strait-laced, English world. Frederick had pointed this out triumphantly to his wife when just once she had ventured timidly to ask him if Frenchwomen generally had less reticence of manner, less delicacy of speech and glance than English ones of the same rank in society. "Don't you pretend to any absurd squeamishness," he had added, with a threatening look, "because I'd very soon

teach you who was master here" (Lizzie was certainly under the impression that she had been taught that lesson already), "and let you know that the associates, either male or female, who are good enough for me, are good enough for my wife. A pleasant, lively house this would be, if you had to choose our visitors!"

So thenceforth Lizzie refrained from any open comments on the manners, dress, or conversation of her husband's friends, directing all her efforts to the difficult task of keeping her young, volatile sister as much as possible away from them, and of repulsing, without giving absolute offence, the gallantries some of the idle gentlemen were disposed to lavish upon herself. Monsieur de Vigny in particular had been from the first extremely anxious to give his grave young hostess lessons in French, and more than once Frederick had said that she should, whether she liked it or not, avail herself of this generous offer; but the Frenchman (he was about forty, and a

decidedly accomplished person) had always strongly repudiated the idea of coercion in the matter, and had declared that he was more than willing to wait the pleasure of Madame. This was the only unmarried gentleman of the party, and, because he never failed day after day to ask how the sick brother was going on, he was the one Lizzie disliked the least of the whole set. The other men were coarser in their manners, more undisguised in their professions of admiration, less careful altogether to hide their real natures than this middle-aged Monsieur de Vigny. He neither drank deeply nor played at cards—the rest did both, and Frederick Leonard, as all too soon his wife discovered, not only set them the example, but drank and played more desperately than any one of the number.

It was very hard for Lizzie, knowing now all she did, and suffering almost hourly as she did, too, from the violence of her husband's temper and the exactions of his imperious will—it was very hard for her to

preserve a cheerful countenance under her brother's ever watchful, anxious eyes, and to seem as if life were flowing on smoothly and pleasantly with her. It is true that Willie never again asked her a single question concerning her domestic peace, but then she knew his doubts and fears had been roused, and she was continually in alarm lest something in her face or voice when she went to him from the uncongenial society down-stairs —sometimes from miserable scenes with her half-intoxicated husband—should betray how keen was the anguish hidden under the smiles she had invoked for him. And because of this alarm, the loving sister often denied herself many a half-hour that she might have spent beside his couch, and passed the stolen time weeping out a little of her wretchedness in the quiet of her own room. Mrs. Leonard had promised her, when first the gay party arrived, that Willie should be rarely alone, and so Lizzie knew that the hours of her compulsory absence from him were, in a great measure,

hours of gain instead of loss to him. Of gain because Mrs. Leonard would, with far more courage and faithfulness than the timid and self-mistrustful sister, take every opportunity of leading his mind to the contemplation of those all-important truths which he would soon discover to be worth more than the whole wisdom and knowledge of the world that was receding from him.

Frederick had never thought it necessary to repeat his visit to his young brother-in-law, and it was only by the merest chance that he ever mentioned his name or appeared to remember his existence. Lizzie might, under different circumstances, have felt and even resented this deeply, but things had gone too far for so comparatively trifling a circumstance to affect her. Very thankful would she have been had her husband evinced the same neglect and forgetfulness in the case of Kitty; but while Kitty continued to amuse him—Kitty, whose weak little head was quite turned by all the injudicious notice she re-

ceived—there was very little hope of anything so desirable as this. In all his walks or drives, no matter who else were his companions, Frederick insisted on having his wife's sister close beside him, and when the weather kept the party indoors, the young lady was invited to play billiards, battledore and shuttlecock, or some noisy game or other with her admiring and patronizing brother-in-law.

Thus Miss Kitty grew to think herself a personage of vast importance, and to look impatient and even rebellious when Lizzie occasionally (she did not dare attempt it often) tried to keep her in Willie's room.

Frederick was not long in finding out how strongly his wife disapproved of his monopoly of her little sister, and whenever an extra indulgence in that fatal habit which was growing upon him, or some freak of his naturally tyrannical temper impelled him to put his victim on the rack, he would make Lizzie herself bring Kitty to him, and coolly tell her

that it was his pleasure to excite the child's vanity, and develope all the feminine weaknesses of her nature. He knew that his wife, with all her timidity and meekness, would never have suffered this to go on but for her dread of any open rupture which might bring to Willie the knowledge of her conjugal misery, and produce in him an excitement he would be ill able to bear. The frosty Christmas weather had already told injuriously upon the weakened body of this poor fading boy; his cough had returned, and was accompanied by other symptoms of a rather alarming nature, and but that the air of Cornwall was milder than the air he would have at home, and that he said he liked being with his darling Lizzie, she would have judged it best to let him leave her while travelling was still not impossible to him. Frederick could always gain his point in reference to Kitty by threatening to advise Willie to betake himself [illegible]. Perhaps in reality he never contemplated doing anything so brutal, but he

saw that Lizzie believed him, and that it ensured submission to his will, and he thought it good fun to watch the anguish of her look as she sometimes debated which it was her duty to sacrifice.

"I know I am cruel to Kitty," she said one day to Mrs. Leonard, while tears of burning indignation (she could not be always patient and uncomplaining) chased each other down her white cheeks, "but what *can* I do? If Frederick gave a hint to Willie that he did not want him here, Willie would not stay an hour, no matter how unfit he might be for the journey home. It would kill him to travel such weather as this, and what would poor mamma, who is ill herself, think of my sending him from me in the state he is? I believe I shall go mad if the present distractions of my life continue much longer. I am neither strong enough nor wise enough to fight my way through them. In after years Kitty may loathe my very name as having been the

means of bringing her under the pernicious influence which is ruining her."

"Kitty must in any case be saved from further mischief," Mrs. Leonard said decisively. "I will write to Sarah myself, and tell her to get her home by some means or other immediately—My love" (as Lizzie was about to speak) "we know that this is the right thing to do, and, as for the result, we must trust and hope that it will in no way be prejudicial to your poor brother."

"Frederick will guess in a moment that we have managed this," said Lizzie despairingly, "and he will be certain to revenge himself upon me through Willie. Oh, my darling Willie!" she continued, with increasing excitement; "on your innocent head, too, must fall the consequences of my wretched, wretched marriage. Why did I not die rather than bring misery upon all whom I love?"

"Because your work was not done," replied her friend, assuming that this pathetic

exclamation was really meant as a question; "be patient, my Lizzie, and never forget the encouraging promise (I am afraid you *have* forgotten it lately),—"'as thy day, so shall thy strength be.'"

This occurred just before Christmas, and when, to give his foreign friends a notion of how this season was kept in merry England, as well as to convince the "Honorable Edward" that Pengarthen Hall could be otherwise than "awfully slow," Mr. Frederick Leonard ordered splendid feasting every day, and encouraged dancing, singing, acting, and mad games of all kinds, half through every night.

In this wild reveling, however, Lizzie absolutely refused to join, and after a little blustering and a tolerable share of abusive language, Frederick yielded the point. "We can certainly do without you," he said, spitefully, "for no doubt your miserable, kill-joy looks would act as a wet blanket upon some of us; but I'll have Kitty for a dance or two

every night. She's worth a thousand of such as you."

The annual dinner to the tenantry was always a most distasteful and irritating duty to the fine gentleman who hated the poor, and would not have raised his little finger to save one amongst them from death or any other calamity.

This dinner took place on Christmas eve, in the middle of the day, and Frederick, according to the usage of his ancestors, had to preside at it. Lizzie came too, though her husband had not invited her, and her sweet face and gracious, kindly ways, made up to these humble guests for the churlishness and unsociability of their landlord, to which indeed they were all of them accustomed.

It was in consequence of something Lizzie had overheard between two of the women at table that, when it was all over, she said to her husband:

"Have you forgotten to invite the vicar

and his wife for to-morrow? I understand they have been in the habit of dining at the Hall every Christmas day."

"Attend to your own business," he replied crossly (that dinner had not improved his temper, and he was unaware that Monsieur de Vigny had entered the room), "I don't intend to have any besides our own party to-morrow. What are the Chesters to me, that I should endure their insupportable prosing and twaddling? I detest nothing so much as parsons, except parsons' wives."

"I suppose Mrs. Erskine is coming," Lizzie now added, giving up the Chesters with little regret. "I remember when she was here in the summer you spoke about meeting again at Christmas. I ought to have thought of this sooner, as I must manage to get her the same rooms she occupied before."

"She is *not* coming," thundered Frederick, looking half inclined to strike his wife, though she was innocent of any intention to annoy him. "Now be off to your precious brother,

and send down Kitty to help to place the holly and mistletoe. I told her she should do it."

Even before the dinner began that evening the master of the sumptuous banquet had taken far more wine than was good for him, and by the time the ladies left the table, he was scarcely conscious of what he said or did. Lizzie had given the signal for retiring sooner than usual, because she perceived with deep shame and distress how it was with her husband, and on entering the drawing room she sat down on the nearest couch, forgetful for once of her duties as hostess, and buried her burning face in her hands.

"How wonderful these English women are!" said one French matron to another, speaking low and in her own language. "Here is this little wife breaking her heart because her husband drinks till he talks nonsense. *Ma foi!* if she had the happiness to be French, she would just say, '*amuse toi mon garçon!*" and in the meanwhile amuse *herself* in any way that her inclination prompted. It

is really a grave misfortune to be born a daughter of *perfide Albion.*"

Lizzie only waited till the coffee was brought in, and then stole away, as she usually did at this hour, to spend a few minutes with her brother. He was languid and feverish to-night, oppressed, he said, with all kinds of gloomy fancies; and the trembling sister, concealing with difficulty her own exceeding depression, had just arranged his pillows and taken a chair beside him, when a messenger from below presented himself at the door.

Mr. Leonard had sent to beg all the ladies to return to the dining-room—the gentlemen were going to drink their healths, and wished them to be present at the toasts given in their honour. The other ladies, accompanied by Miss Kitty, had already gone in.

"Tell your master I am otherwise engaged," said Lizzie, her voice shaking from indignation. "My brother is worse than usual to-night, and I cannot leave him again."

Even for Kitty's sake she would not desert the poor sick boy who had so welcomed her coming, to mingle in such a scene as she could picture the one downstairs. A few days more and Kitty would probably be far removed from the evil influences that now surrounded her, and even if to guard her from the future from similar dangers Lizzie had to expose all her own domestic wretchedness, she had fully resolved that this should be done. Mrs. Leonard was right. No fear of consequences to *any one* could justify the sacrifice of this young child's purity of mind and simplicity of character. But just for these few days she must be let alone.

Half-an-hour passed, the brother and sister talking little, but holding each other's hands, and feeling soothed and quieted in being thus together, and believing that for this one evening they should be left in peace. Then there came a gentle, half-hesitating tapping at the dressing-room door.

Deeming it another message from her hus-

band, Lizzie's colour changed rapidly as she rose to ascertain what was wanted.

"You will not leave me," Willie cried plaintively (he was really curiously nervous and out of spirits to-night). And Lizzie turned to assure him that her mind was quite made up on the subject; he need have no anxiety whatever.

To her unbounded surprise it was not a servant, but Monsieur de Vigny who stood in the passage just outside her brother's door.

His look and voice were both respectful and earnest as he explained his errand in the most fluent English he could command.

He thought Madame ought to know that a disgraceful joke was being carried on in the dining-room. They had made little Miss Kitty take a great many glasses of wine, and now, with the aid of a Prayer-book, they were pretending to marry her to Mr. Edward Erskine. Mr. Leonard was reading the service as well as his intoxicated condition per-

mitted, and everybody was laughing enough to kill themselves—even the servants who came continually with more wine in and out of the room. Monsieur de Vigny had been terribly shocked, Frenchman though he was, and had taken advantage of the general hubbub to come and warn Madame of what was going on.

Lizzie had scarcely patience to hear this story to the end. It was something more than the ireful little spirit of old that awoke and struggled in her now, as her mind took in and sickened over the shameful facts revealed to her.

"I must go for one moment, Willie, darling," she said, running back for this purpose into the room—and then, without waiting for his reply, she flew past Monsieur de Vigny (who followed her, however, very closely) down the long passage, down the longer staircase, across the wide, cold hall, until she stood panting and breathless, quite unable for a minute to proceed further, within a few

yards of the room whence issued sounds of unrestrained and continuous laughter that seemed to curdle her very blood.

"You had better wait a little before you go in," said Monsieur de Vigny, who had come up to her at last, and now remained standing at a short distance and looking half frightened at the effect of his communication; "I have agitated you very much—let me fetch you a glass of wine?"

"No, thank you," with a shudder at the very name of wine. "I am only waiting till I get breath enough to speak. Please do not stay with me."

"Madame has only to command," replied this polite gentleman, with a low bow, which was unfortunately quite lost upon the intended recipient of it, "but I may not have another opportunity of saying something I very much wish to say to you. Permit me two minutes for this purpose. I came to your house, madame, with no respect for any woman in the

world. Perhaps I have had some reason for esteeming your sex lightly; but it has been painful to me so to to. Bad as I am myself, —all men are bad, you see—I have ever regretted not being able to think better of women. Madame, I shall leave your house with a very different opinion of one woman, at least, and she will raise the whole sex in my estimation. I know this is not interesting to you, especially at such a moment, but I could not help saying it as an introduction to the rest. Madame, these ladies in that room, these country-women of mine, are not fitting associates for you and your young sister. Had your husband spoken the truth to-day, when you questioned him about some English friends you were proposing to invite to-morrow, I should not have needed to give you this information now. I don't know whether it will be of any use to you, but my own feelings as a gentleman have been roused, and I could not but speak before I go. I shall go

to-morrow or the next day, and if I can have any influence over the other gentlemen, I shall persuade them to leave with their wives also. Monsieur Leonard intended only to show us a specimen of English hospitality; for this I thank him as one of his obliged guests, but I thank him still more for showing me a specimen of an English matron, a wife, who while younger, fairer, more bewitching than any wife I have ever known, is yet pure and good and holy as an angel, or a Sister of Mercy. Madame, forgive me. I have done."

It was well he had, for Lizzie was not inclined to listen to him any longer. Whether he were sincere or not in his statements and professions, she did not pause to consider; she felt no concern at all about the matter. What he told her in reference to the female guests beneath her roof added largely to the fire already raging in her heart, and with a brief acknowledgment of his kindness—an acknowledgment that sounded coldly to the

less pre-occupied and more impulsive Frenchman, whose virtuous feelings had not been so often roused that they should be taken as a matter of course—Lizzie drew up her drooping, trembling figure to its fullest height, and walked straight into the noisy dining room.

CHAPTER XVII.

RESULT OF A WIFE'S INTERFERENCE WITH HER HUSBAND'S AMUSEMENT.

THE mock ceremony was apparently ended; for Lizzie's eye, as she went in, fell upon an open prayer book thrown carelessly on the table, amongst decanters, empty fruit plates, and some over-turned wine glasses, that did not add to the order or decency of the revolting scene.

"Queen Vashti come at last!" exclaimed Frederick, with a loud laugh, and a defiant look at his pale wife, as she moved on towards the table, heedless apparently of the many curious and inquiring eyes turned in her di-

rection—"Come in time to give her blessing to the interesting young couple whom we have just joined together in—"

"Kitty, I want you immediately. I command you, in the name of your absent mother, to leave this room with me."

The voice was so clear, so determined, so suggestive of intense excitement, kept down because there was an urgent need for present calmness, that even the husband was for the moment awed by it, and left his tipsy speech unfinished that he might watch and listen with the others for what was coming next.

Kitty was sitting by Edward Erskine, whose arm had been thrown familiarly over the back of her chair, and whose hand stroked unrebuked from time to time the golden ringlets of the vain little girl, elated both by wine and the notion they had instilled into her silly head that she was really married to the gay, handsome gentleman at her side. Her cheeks were painfully flushed, and her eyes unnaturally bright. Lizzie had shud-

dered and turned sick when she first looked at her.

To her elder sister's peremptory appeal Miss Kitty had for a minute seemed inclined to turn a deaf ear. At any rate she kept her seat, and directed a supplicating glance to her amused companion, as if to ask him, in virtue of his new authority, to interfere and prevent her being carried off to the dull sick room upstairs.

Edward Erskine, though tolerably sober, disliked Lizzie quite enough to be glad of a safe opportunity for annoying her. He felt sure that her husband would never suffer her to have her will in the matter in question, and that he would be eagerly backed by the latter in whatever efforts he made towards detaining Kitty. So he said laughingly, in reply to the child's pleading look:

"I believe the ceremony that has just taken place gives me a right to resist any authority inferior to my own that may be asserted over this fair young lady. She is evidently her-

self unwilling to leave me, and I must therefore humbly entreat that no further claim be for the present made upon her. When we have had our waltz together under the mistletoe bough we will ask her again what her pleasure is in the matter."

"Bravo, bravo, Ned!" cried Frederick, noisily, and pouring out more wine as he spoke; "here, I am going to propose the bride and bridegroom, and Queen Vashti shall drink it too, or I'll know the reason why. Ladies and gentlemen all, be good enough to fill your glasses. Hand over Kitty's to me, Ned; she must have some of this sparkling Burgundy."

But Lizzie was already standing by her sister's chair, the paleness of her face replaced by a deep burning flush, and her usually soft eyes glowing with wrath that no words could have expressed. She did not attempt words now. She caught Kitty's reluctant hand (the child was frightened and subdued at last) and drew her, with a force that would have

triumphed over resistance, had resistance been attempted, from her seat and from the table. Everyone in the room appeared suddenly spell-bound, intent only on watching with breathless interest this strange scene. Kitty with a bowed head, and an expression, half of wonder half of shame, upon her pretty piquante face, compelled to walk on as rapidly as her sister, who with a firm, dignified step, —for all its swiftness—moved straight towards the door, taking no more heed of her husband or of any of his guests than if they had been invisible to her, as indeed it is very probable they were.

Nothing was said, nothing was done until the door had closed upon the two sisters. Then, after a minute's pause, and an exchange of shrugs and amused glances between some of the ladies, Edward Erskine exclaimed lightly to his host:

"Queen Vashti then has had the best of it, after all, it seems. I think she has even outdone her rebellious namesake of ancient

times. Commend me to those meek, soft-eyed women when once their blood is up. I fancy pretty little Kitty will sleep on an uneasy pillow to-night."

He did not see, until he had done speaking, the white passion working slowly up through all the mists of intoxication into Frederick Leonard's face. Vain, frivolous coxcomb, that this Honourable Edward was, he had really no wish or intention of rousing the slumbering demon in the breast of the selfish tyrant he called his friend. He was startled as much as any of the lookers on when with a wild oath Lizzie's husband sprang towards the door, dragged it fiercely open, and commenced a swift pursuit of those who had just gone out. A few of the men, and even one or two of the most curious of the women, followed him as far as the head of the staircase; but he was greatly in advance of them all, and so, not knowing what might be going to happen, they wisely returned to the lower part of the house, and contented themselves,

while waiting the issue of this serious conjugal difference, in voting the "English" the most extraordinary and wrong-headed people under the sun.

In the meanwhile Lizzie, unconscious of her husband's pursuit of her, had gained, with her rescued charge, the welcome sanctuary of Willie's room. Had the excitement of her mind been less, she would, probably, have taken Kitty to Mrs. Leonard, or anywhere rather than into the presence of her poor, sick brother, whose state of health and comparative isolation of life had quickened his perceptive faculties to a degree that had hitherto made Lizzie excessively cautious as to what she allowed to come under his observation.

But in the new surprise that awaited her, the surprise of finding Leah Ash bending over Willie's couch, she had no opportunity of reflecting on her indiscretion. Neither was time afforded any of them for questions or explanation. A hurried whisper from Leah,

which Lizzie was too frightened and bewildered to comprehend, about answering Mr. Anstruther's bell instead of Isaure, and finding him half fainting from the exertion of moving—an assurance, on Willie's part, contradicted by his white face and lips, that he was better now, that his new nurse had been very kind and attentive to him—and then they were all silenced and transfixed by the abrupt bursting open of the door, and the apparition of Frederick Leonard standing, with his face in a flame and his eyes glowing and sparkling wrathfully, upon the threshold.

If a man's deeds are ever to be excused on the plea of intoxication, or drunkenness, which is the plainer word, let this man have the benefit of such a plea on the present occasion. He will need any extenuating circumstances that can be urged in his favour when it is told that his savage eyes instantly sought out his wife from the group pressing together round the invalid's couch at the moment of his entrance, and that having dis-

covered her he made one bound in the direction of the spot where she was standing, and with his open palm struck her a violent blow on the check that had not yet lost the red glow of shame excited by the scene she had so recently witnessed.

Lizzie, wholly unprepared for this crowning act of baseness, and not because she was conscious of much physical pain from the blow itself, uttered a quick, sharp cry, and recoiled with such a sudden and unsteady movement, that Leah, believing she was falling, sprang forward and threw her arms round her young mistress, murmuring words between her set teeth that Lizzie was far too excited and bewildered to gather the meaning of at the time, but which recurred to her and became frightfully intelligible at a period that was fast approaching.

No sooner had Frederick Leonard's hand fallen upon his helpless, innocent wife, than his wandering senses returned to him. I suppose there never existed a man who, whether

from natural cruelty or under the influence of inebriation, struck a woman for the first time, without an immediate and stinging sense of moral degradation following the cowardly act. Hitherto, in spite of all his increasing vices, some little remnant of self-respect had clung to this miserable victim of his own unrestrained passions; but as that blow descended and his young wife's cry smote upon his ear, he felt (as if by some sudden and mysterious intuition) that he had ceased to be a *gentleman*, and that henceforth he must rank with blackguards and cowards.

Some wild notion of at once apologising humbly for what he had done, of making all who had witnessed it promise never to betray him, had just flashed across his repentant mind when Willie, the hitherto unnoticed Willie, who had been nearly fainting on his couch at the time his brother-in-law burst into the room, got up, unassisted, from his recumbent posture, and with a face so white and corpse-like that he might have been

taken for an avenging ghost from another world, made his trembling way to his sister's husband, and with the words "Brute, coward, tyrant!" coming gaspingly from his pale lips, raised his poor, feeble arm with the intent to pay back, with interest, the blow his darling Lizzie had received, but fell himself, before so much as his finger had touched his adversary, in a dead faint upon the ground.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONE DEAD AND ONE DESOLATE.

THE half-distracted sister, the pitying Mrs. Leonard, two doctors, who had been summoned in all haste, and Leah Ash, watched together throughout that weary night beside the dying bed of poor Willie Anstruther, watched without indeed the faintest hope of saving him, even till his mother could arrive; but, on Lizzie's part, with a wild passion of grief and love that would not believe in the reality of the coming woe, and on the part of her fellow watchers, with a benevolent desire to afford the brother all the relief which skill and care could procure, and to soothe, in some de-

gree, the anguish of the terror-stricken sister, who, in addition to the natural despair the idea of thus suddenly losing her beloved brother would have excited, was overwhelmed with the miserable conviction that indirectly she had been the means of hastening his death.

What had become of Frederick, after he had, in gloomy silence, seen Willie recovered from his fainting fit, no one knew, and no one cared to inquire. Monsieur de Vigny had volunteered to go himself for the doctors, and once, when Lizzie ran down-stairs to ascertain whether he had returned, she heard some of the gentlemen, who were still lingering about the brilliantly lighted rooms, saying that Mr. Leonard had complained of feeling very ill, and was no doubt gone to bed.

Perhaps it was the wife's duty to find out whether this were so or not; if it was, I am sorry to be obliged to state that Lizzie wholly neglected it, yielding, without even a pang of self-reproach, to the feeling, which prompted

her to give every moment of her time to the dying boy, who clung to her in those last sad hours with a pathetic earnestness of affection that was very touching to see.

As the morning dawned, the holy Christmas morning, stealing with its pale, cold light into the quiet room, the small remnant of strength, which Willie could hitherto boast, and which had been kept up throughout the night by the most powerful stimulants the doctors could venture to give him, began to decline with alarming rapidity. There could be no longer any disguise about the matter, any concealment, even from himself. He was sinking fast. Mrs. Leonard was the one to whisper this intelligence gently and lovingly into his still conscious ear. She feared he was scarcely prepared for it, but was rejoiced to see a faint smile breaking on his lips, as he pressed her hand, never, for an instant, though, withdrawing his yearning eyes from his sister's white face, and said softly—"Thank you for this; but thank you far more for teaching me

why I need not fear death. If it is coming soon, I should like to be left alone with Lizzie, though you have all been very, very kind to me, and if I were not so weak, I would tell you how grateful I am. God bless you all!"

There was one present to whom this blessing from dying lips brought no feeling of peace or holy calm—only a dull aching consciousness that, though poor Willie knew it not, she must be for ever excluded from it, if, as for the first time in her life, she was almost ready to believe these things, that breathed of a world beyond the grave, had any reality in them at all.

In a few minutes from the time Willie's request had been made known, the room was cleared of doctors and zealous nurses, and the brother and sister were alone.

It was a sob from Lizzie that first broke the deep silence that had followed the exit of her companions, and then trying with all her might to keep down this noisy demonstration, she cried, in something of her old childish

manner, and with all her old childish impulsiveness:

"Oh, my darling, don't leave me yet; don't, Willie!—I cannot bear it."

"Lizzie," he replied, in a voice of indescribable pathos, and stretching out for her his nerveless arms as he spoke; "what *I* cannot bear either to think of or see is *this*," pointing to the cheek that still bore the marks of the last night's cruel blow; "I should be quite happy in dying, in going to a land where, as Mrs. Leonard has so often read to me, 'the inhabitant shall no more say, I am sick,' if it were not for the thought that I am leaving you to the tender mercies of a man, who is less a man than a fiend. Lizzie, I have long suspected that you were unhappy, but I never *could* have imagined anything like that."

"My darling, he never did it before—he had taken too much wine," said Lizzie, eagerly, deeming just now the worst of her trials, in connection with her husband, light

and insignificant beside the one which Willie's loss would entail. You must not exaggerate the evils of my position, Willie. Frederick will bitterly regret having struck me. Perhaps it may even be good for us both in the end—it may make him fear the effects of drinking; it may give him a moral sobering that nothing short of this act of violence could have done—but oh, my darling, my precious Willie! I am not thinking of my husband now—I am thinking of you."

"Lizzie, you have a hard life before you," resumed the dying boy, apparently heedless of her last words. "Viewing it in the very best light we can, you must have an unusually thorny path to tread. And you are not strong by nature, Lizzie, mentally strong I mean. My darling, have you found a heavenly staff to lean upon? Are you trusting in Him, who has said to the weakest of his followers, '*My* strength is sufficient for thee?'"

"I hope I am, Willie," Lizzie whispered in a low voice. "I try to do this, and I believe God is helping me. My love, my dearest, it would quite break my heart to think how all my hopes of happy companionship with you, through long, peaceful years, have been dashed to the ground, if I did not look forward to still happier companionship in the world you will enter first. We shall meet there, Willie, and perhaps God will have mercy upon me, though I have so long rebelled against Him, and bring this meeting about soon."

Willie kissed, with all the little strength he had left, her cold hand that clung to him so fondly, and said, in a voice growing fainter every minute—

"Lizzie, I don't think you will die yet, but it is great joy to me to know that you will come to me some time, when your work and warfare here shall be accomplished. My darling, everything, as we near the grave,

wears a different aspect. I did very wrong last night in trying to strike your husband. Ask him, when I am gone, to forgive me for your sake. I need not say, 'seek to win him to truth and holiness'—this, I know, you will do; but, my Lizzie, seek patience for yourself, when your duties seem harder and more repulsive than you had imagined they could ever be. Remember, your Father in Heaven can work miracles through the weakest instruments. Trust Him wholly, fully, unreservedly, as I, on the brink of Jordan, must pray to do now. Lizzie, you must comfort my poor mother; you must assure her I was content to go—I am content —I am happy—I bless and praise my God and Saviour for all things."

These were the last intelligible words he spoke. About a quarter of an hour afterwards he went to sleep—to that sleep which knows no earthly waking—in his tender sister's arms. His was a brighter and happier Christmas than fell to the lot of any of

those assembled to celebrate the joyous festival at Pengarthen Hall.

* * * * *

Mrs. Anstruther and her eldest daughter had come and gone, taking with them the beloved remains of him they were too late to see, even for one short minute, in life. The mother, rising against all opposition from a sick bed, to obey Lizzie's first urgent summons, had been so ill during the whole time of her brief stay in Cornwall, that Sarah could not rest until she got her safe at home again. It was indeed a bitter grief to this devoted sister to leave poor Lizzie encompassed by troubles of ever varying shape, but she knew that Mrs. Leonard would do for her whatever the most zealous earthly friend could do, and she dreaded lest a longer sojourn at Pengarthen Hall should reveal to Mrs. Anstruther more than she had yet discovered of her married daughter's unhappiness. Frederick Leonard had been ill, really ill,

ever since the night of Christmas eve, and so his mother-in-law and himself had scarcely seen each other, and the former was left in blissful ignorance of the worst of Lizzie's trials. Kitty, of course, accompanied the home-returning party, a sadder, and, we may hope, a wiser child than she had been a few weeks back. That the wine she had been persuaded to drink on that fatal evening should have rendered her too ill to be present at her brother's death-bed, was a circumstance this really affectionate, though weak and vain little girl was not likely soon to forget. If it did not quite cure her of vanity, which is, alas! almost an incurable disease in some natures, it cured her of her admiration for Lizzie's husband, and it made the very sight or name of wine odious to her for many years.

Mr. Leonard's guests dispersed as soon as his indisposition obliged him to withdraw from their society. Even the Honourable Edward discovered that he was imperatively wanted in half a hundred other places, and

that he was the worst possible companion in a sick room.

"Let them all go," said Frederick, with a sullen oath or two (he was by no means patient or gentle under his novel sufferings) "and when you have had enough of it" (this was to his wife) "I suppose you'll follow their example, and leave me to die like a dog."

As for having had enough of it, Lizzie might very truthfully have told him that that had been the case long ago, but with regard to his last assumption she knew that he as little feared it as *she* had come to fear any mortal thing, except the failure of her own strength and courage in the duties that had no longer a particle of love to hallow or lighten them.

From the time of Willie's death she had done everything that her hand found to do, with a dull, mechanical exactitude and perseverance that the inner life, the thinking and feeling part of her, seemed to have nothing to do with. It almost, indeed, seemed as if

what we call the heart was dead within her, and that the moving-spring of all her actions was just that cold sense of duty which, unaccompanied by any tender emotion, makes every service rendered a pain and a reproach to the recipient of it. If Frederick Leonard was still too much absorbed in himself and his own bodily sufferings to be conscious of his wife's lack of sympathy and tenderness, he was spared a trial that often falls to the lot of many a better man.

Mrs. Leonard would gladly have helped Lizzie in her uncongenial duties had she been permitted so to do, but Frederick refused to have his step-mother near him, and extended the same prohibition to all except his wife, and, strange to say, Leah Ash, who never came willingly into his room, and always appeared restless and ill at ease until she could get out of it again.

Perhaps it was for this very reason that her tyrannical master chose to make a claim upon her services, or it might be that

she had become to him an object of suspicion, and that he desired to watch her for himself.

Lizzie and her housekeeper rarely exchanged a dozen words. The former did not feel unkindly towards Leah—how could she after that last night by poor Willie's dying bed?—but the remembrance of what she had told Leah in the garden, mingled with some growing mistrust of the woman herself, that she could by no reasoning either account for or put away, inclined the mistress to a reserve towards the servant which no doubt struck coldly enough on the heart that had at least ever kept one warm, true place, in it, since Lizzie first came as a young, happy bride to Pengarthen Hall.

Hitherto, that is up to the time when Mrs. Anstruther and her two daughters left Cornwall, Frederick had obstinately refused to see a doctor, or to take any remedies for his sickness but those of his own choosing. Lizzie believed that this arose from his conviction—

a conviction which she and others naturally shared—that he was only paying the inevitable penalty of those habits of intoxication in which he had now for a considerable time been indulging. But the very day after the husband and wife were left alone, the former confessed that he grew worse rather than better, and told Lizzie that if she chose to send for a physician from Penzance—a stranger, and neither of those who had attended Willie Anstruther—he would at least listen to what he had to say, and perhaps be guided by his advice.

"I will send at once," Lizzie replied, in her calm, indifferent voice,—"this evening, so that some one may be found who will come over the first thing to-morrow morning."

"Oh, there's no such great hurry as that," the sick man answered, as he tossed uneasily and impatiently upon his luxurious bed, that seemed incapable of affording him even a minute's repose—"You can send, however,

if you like. There's a Doctor Baring I've heard spoken of as a rising man—find out where he lives, and send for him."

Leah Ash had been in the room during this brief conversation. She went out immediately after, and when in the course of the evening she should have appeared in answer to a bell that always summoned her, Isaure came instead, and reported that the housekeeper had been seized with a violent headache, and prayed to be allowed to remain, until she was better, in her own apartment.

A few hours later, while Frederick slept, Lizzie went for a little change of atmosphere down into the large deserted drawing-room. She felt very miserable, very hopeless, very weary of life altogether, and kneeling by the blazing fire, because she shivered with cold, this poor broken-hearted child began to sob, as she rarely sobbed now, and to wish that she might die, and go to Willie.

What could she gain—what could any-

body gain—by her continuing to live and suffer as she was doing? A hired nurse would be quite as useful to her husband as she could be, and perhaps, if sufficiently paid, bestow upon him more zealous care, more willing attention, than Lizzie, with her cold, unloving heart, was at present capable of giving. And who else would very greatly miss her? Miss her as she was now, with all the freshness, all the joyousness, all the spirit of her youth, entirely passed away from her!

True, both Mrs. Leonard and Willie, one a long-tried Christian, the other speaking from the threshold of eternity, had exhorted her to fight life's battle bravely, to endure with patient meekness whatever cross might be laid upon her, and to look above for the strength lacking in herself. But what was there for her to do, after all?

Anybody could nurse a sick man, who, as long as every material want was supplied, neither sought nor cared for the love which

would have made every difference in the world to the one who supplied those wants. And then, as to reforming either his heart or life, influencing him in the minutest degree, on the very minutest point, Lizzie felt that this was too wild and fantastic a notion to be for an instant entertained.

Clearly then, there was nothing for her to do, no battle for her to fight, no glory for her to gain. Why might she not die at once and be at peace? Willie had won his crown after a comparatively short bearing of the cross. Would God be less kind to her, because she was a woman and very weak?

So the dull sobbing that brought no relief went on until the fire had burned low in the capacious grate, and the room, unlighted except by the ruddy flames at which Lizzie had warmed her cold hands on first coming in, grew dark and dismal enough to oppress the lightest and happiest spirit in the world.

Just as Lizzie was rising from her kneeling posture to return to her husband's room, a

low and apparently cautious knocking at the closed door made her pause by the little remnant of fire and light as, wondering who could have sought her here, she said in her weary voice—"Come in."

The door instantly opened, and Leah Ash, looking unnaturally tall and shadowy in the gloom that filled all that part of the room, came in and walked swiftly but noiselessly to Lizzie's side.

CHAPTER XIX.

LEAH'S STARTLING CONFESSION.

"I HAVE come," she said, in a voice that seemed fearful of rising above a whisper, "to bid you a final good bye. At our last confidential interview, by the lake side, I told you I might soon obey your wish and leave you for ever. The time has come for me to fulfil this promise. I have done what I remained here to do. I have no personal dread as to the consequences. I have all along known what they were likely to be; but I have my own resource, and I shall not scruple, when far away from you, to employ it. I will not

tell you again how I have loved you, nor how much the hope of rescuing you from a wretched fate assisted in strengthening my resolution to do what I have done. You would not care to hear—"

"Stop, stop, Leah, I implore of you," interrupted Lizzie at this point, a wild, strange fear beginning to dawn upon her mind, "and before you say another word concerning me or yourself, tell me what this thing is that you have done. Tell it to me at once, and plainly. I cannot endure riddles."

"I have poisoned your husband!"

The wife's heart, so calm and passionless ten minutes ago, seemed to shake as these dreadful words fell distinctly upon her ear. She had no power to move, though her first impulse had been to spring up and summon others to listen with her to this terrible confession. Some mysterious spell, however, appeared to be laid upon her, some influence that chained her to her seat, and forced her to keep back all the hard words she would

have uttered, and say simply and mechanically, "Go on."

"Long before you knew him," resumed Leah, "he came to me with his honied words, with his false professions, with his selfish designs. There was something in an educated daughter of a common farmer that a little interested this fine gentleman, satiated with all ordinary amusements, and seeking novelty as the greatest boon life had now to bestow. It matters not to any one whether I loved him, or whether ambition alone actuated me in listening to his suit. He said his intentions were honourable, and though in part I believed him I insisted on a written statement to this effect. In the first moments of his infatuation he would have done anything short of giving me his name, rather than be denied the pastime of making love to me. When he found that a peasant's daughter, a girl of the 'people' so despised and trampled on by him, dared to be honest and virtuous, dared to tell him she would only come to him as his wife,

his admiration changed to fierce dislike, and he left me with words of scorn and bitter mocking that no woman breathing was ever likely to forget. I did not forget them; and if I angered my father by refusing to bring forward that written promise of marriage, and thus exposing to the world his baseness and my own innocence (I knew he had caused it to be believed that I was as frail as he wished me to be), it was because such a revenge would have come far short of what I was prompted, by all the insults I had received at his hands, to inflict upon him. I came to Pengarthen, as his hired servant, for the sole purpose of revenge. He dared not resist my will in this matter, while that paper remained with me as a witness against him. He would have died a thousand deaths rather than have it published to the world that he, an aristocrat, a gentleman, had promised marriage to an insignificant, vulgar farmer's daughter. So I came here without opposition, and certainly without any very clear or definite no-

tion of what my next step was to be. I meant to study him closely, and to discover in what way I could most effectually stab him to the heart, as he had stabbed me. I believe, had I found that he loved you, his young wife, very truly and fondly, I should have poisoned you—poisoned you, though that very first night we ever met you won my heart, and made me cleave to you, as I never thought, after what had happened, to cleave to anything on earth again. But a very short time sufficed to convince me that it was not through you I could hope to reach the sentient part of Frederick Leonard's utterly ignoble nature, and from that moment you were safe, and as a second object in my joyless life, sprang up the desire to promote your happiness, or, at least, to ward off from you all the suffering and trouble I possibly could. It was for your sake, even more than to frighten and punish him, that I managed to get rid of Frances Clare. It was not poison I gave her. I am no vulgar murderess, killing for the

mere pleasure of destroying life. In ancient times it was considered an act of heroism, if not a positive virtue, to murder a tyrant, and what greater tyrant than Mr. Frederick Leonard ever lived to be a curse to the world? My plan of poisoning him was not matured till the night I heard him recommend his friend to amuse himself by making love to me, hinting, as I told you once before, that he knew I should not be hard to win! That night he sealed his fate, and thenceforth my work began. I need not detail to you how I did it. I do not want to shock or revolt you more than I can help, and though you love him not, will never love him again, I know you will, at the first, resent my deed as indignantly as if he were still the same to you as on the day you swore to love each other till death. Let it be enough for me to say that the process has been a very slow one. I am not even sure that I have administered sufficient to destroy life, though health is gone for ever. I should not have faltered, had a chance of

safely going on been granted me, but I know something of this Dr. Baring you have sent for; he is said to be a skilful detector of poisons in the human frame, and suspicion once aroused, there would be no difficulty in identifying the poisoner. Your husband has his eye upon me already, and but for his morbid dread of that foolish paper I hold, would have accused me long since. Now I am in your hands. If you choose to denounce me before I can leave your house, I shall offer no resistance. If you suffer me to escape I shall never be heard of again—no, not even by one of my own family. For myself, I do not greatly care how you decide. I am utterly sick of life, and the creed I was taught by my best friend rejects the notion of anything beyond the grave. If, after all my good intent towards you, I have only left your husband a helpless cripple upon your hands, forgive me. I meant to free you quite. And now I have no more to say. Speak one word to me, and if it is to bid me go, I have

all ready for my departure; if it is to bid me stay and meet the murderer's doom, I will be your willing prisoner—only, let me implore you, decide quickly."

But Lizzie neither spoke nor moved; and when Leah, with a sudden terror, seized the poker and stirred the last live coal into a momentary blaze, she found her quiet listener rigid, cold, and unconscious upon her chair.

Was it death, or fainting?

* * * *

From Mrs. Leonard to Sarah Anstruther—

"Pengarthen Hall,

"Jan. 30th, 18—.

"DEAREST SARAH,

"I scarcely know in what words to relate to you the very strange events that have taken place since you left Cornwall. The very next day, when I saw Lizzie for a few moments in the afternoon, she told me that her husband believed himself worse, and had

at length consented to see a doctor. You are aware that I always thought his illness mysterious, and I was therefore relieved to hear of coming advice from some one more competent than he could be to judge of the real nature of his malady. About eight o'clock on that same evening, your sister's French maid suddenly presented herself at my door, and with a scared face (you know she was never brave) entreated me to come at once and see if her mistress was dead or dying. You may be sure that I lost no time in descending to the room where I was told I should find her. It was in the great drawing-room, and there, beside poor Lizzie, whose appearance at first certainly gave me a frightful shock, stood Leah Ash, wringing her hands wildly, and declaring she had killed her dear young mistress. Of course Lizzie herself was my immediate care, for although I had never seen a fainting fit exactly like it, I soon discovered that it was only this, and that by applying the proper remedies we could restore

her without the aid of a doctor. I intended, as soon as she came to herself, to demand of Leah an explanation of the sudden attack, and of the words she had been uttering concerning her own part in it. But to my astonishment, when I turned to look for her after Lizzie's eyes had opened and a faint colour returned to her cheek, she was gone, not only from the room, but from the house. *And she has never since been heard of!*

"Your sister, on fully recovering consciousness, endeavoured to make light of her seizure, refused, with unwonted obstinacy, to do anything I recommended, and with an agitation and excitement of manner wholly opposed to her recent apathy, said she must go at once to her husband. For that night I neither saw nor heard anything more of her. And now comes the strangest part of my story.

"The next morning the whole household was in a state of bustle and confusion. I knew of this, and wondered greatly over it before Lizzie came near me. She did not

come till near the middle of the day. Then, her face, though she had evidently been trying hard to compose it, betrayed some very extraordinary mental emotion, which I need scarcely add did not appear to be of a pleasurable kind.

"All she told me was that her husband had suddenly decided on going out of England for advice, that the travelling carriage had been arranged as a bed for him, that they should proceed to the coast by the shortest and easiest stages, and finally, that it might be years before they returned to their own country again. Poor Lizzie's voice only broke down when she spoke of you and her mother, and begged me to tell you all the above, and that she would write more explicitly as soon as they were settled somewhere.

"I have my suspicions, but I dare not commit them to paper. Indeed at present I am too sorrowful and bewildered to know very clearly what I write or do. They are gone.

Pengarthen Hall, except my little nook in it, is deserted and shut up. A *very* long absence must be contemplated, or the servants would not all have been dismissed. God help and strengthen and direct our beloved Lizzie, for her burden, I fear me, will be a heavy one to carry.

"Till I can write again, dearest Sarah,

"Believe me,

"Your ever faithful friend,

"CAROLINE LEONARD."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LONG YEARS.

About a year after the events recorded in the last chapter, Sarah Anstruther, motherless now, but acting herself a mother's part towards her young sister—Sarah Anstruther, with her grave, thoughtful face, graver and more thoughtful for the trials of the past year, sat one evening alone in a room at Linden House, gazing dreamily into the bright fire upon the hearth, and thinking how insufficient was all external brightness to remove one particle of gloom from a home made desolate by the death or absence of those who had con-

stituted its chief joy and blessing. A tender mother, a brother beloved, slept side by side in the churchyard; a sister not less dear than either—dearer than all, Sarah had sometimes fancied—remained an exile in a foreign country. She herself, with the child solemnly committed to her care, was left alone to mourn the lost ones, and to experience the truth of which so many poets have sung, that—

"A sorrow's crown of sorrow is remembering happier things."

This evening Sarah's heart was especially heavy, for she had been reading one of those brief and unsatisfactory letters that from time to time reached her from the distant land to which Frederick Leonard and his wife had gone when they left Pengarthen. Very painful and unsatisfactory they were, because Lizzie wrote nothing of herself beyond the bare fact, in answer to repeated inquiries both from Mrs. Leonard and her sister, that her health was good, that she was even stronger than she had been in England.

At first, and indeed for nearly half a year after their banishment, she had written doubtfully concerning her husband's state, but the last few letters had given greater hopes of his ultimate restoration; and in the one Sarah had been reading to-night, the one in which the absent daughter spoke of the bitter grief the news of her mother's death had occasioned her, the writer added—"My husband is decidedly improving at last. From the most recent consultation on his rather singular case, I gather that he is considered *safe* as regards life, but that he must anticipate years of weakness and suffering, and never expect to be quite well or strong again."

Lizzie said not a word of what she felt in this dreary anticipation, but Sarah's quick imagination supplied all that was omitted, and very heavy were the sighs that broke from her foreboding heart as she sat now alone and unwatched, meditating on the blighted life of her darling.

Presently Kitty crept softly in—Kitty

grown wonderfully subdued and thoughtful of late—and went up to her sister.

"Home already, dear?" said Sarah, drawing the child, whose cold hand had instantly slid into her own, to the warm ottoman in front of the fire, "I did not hear the carriage come to the door."

"No; I got out at the lodge, and ran up the avenue to warm myself. It is such a cold, cold night, Sarah darling, and the drive seemed so long."

"Did it, dear? But of course it must have done so, and you all alone. How did you leave Alice?"

"Very dull and out of spirits. She says she shall never get over Fanny's marriage to that man; she is sure she will be miserable; that if her husband does not make her so his mother certainly will. They are to live with Mrs. Erskine, you know."

"Poor Fanny!" Sarah said; "I am afraid she has not entered upon a path of roses, but she was always a wilful young lady,

and disinclined to give up the smallest thing on which her heart was set. She will have to yield some of her wilfulness for the time to come, I fancy."

"Oh, yes, that is what Alice thinks, and she says Fanny will turn rebellious, if she is much contradicted. I heard her talk about it all to Mrs. Clare, but Mrs. Clare does not like to be worried, and she told poor Alice she was uncharitable and suspicious, and that she ought to be pleased at her sister's making such a good match."

"A good match!" exclaimed Sarah, almost indignantly; "is there any phrase in the English language more constantly misapplied than this? But surely, Kitty, that was a ring at the front door. What visitor can be coming to us at this time of night?"

"And such a night!" replied Kitty, shivering and nestling closer to her sister; "but of course, if it is anybody it must be the new rector, and as he will not want to talk to me, and I don't like him, and I am very sleepy, I

think I will go to bed. Good-night, darling —I will run away while they are letting him in."

She was gone before Sarah could decide as to whether her spirits were equal to a solitary encounter with the newly arrived rector of their parish, a brisk, cheerful, talkative gentleman, with a strong leaning to puseyism, and an ardent desire to interest all the ladies of his neighbourhood in his original schemes for elevating the moral character of the surrounding poor.

"Kitty *might* have sat up half-an-hour longer," the elder sister had just said to herself, when the parlour-door was thrown open, and Miss Anstruther's very late visitor announced.

An older friend, however, as it turned out, than the rather formidable clergyman, and one, whom Sarah, even at this unseasonable hour, was strangely glad to see.

"Mr. Alleyne," she said, frankly, after the first embarrassment occasioned by his very

unexpected appearance had subsided; "I have had so few things to make me glad of late, that I scarcely know how to express gladness; but, you must be sure, without my telling you, that you are a most welcome visitor. It is more than a year, I believe, since we met last. It seems to me ten, from the troubles that have been crowded into that little space of time. I hope *you* have had a more agreeable experience."

"I have been working very hard nearly all the twelvemonth," he replied, taking sorrowful note of the lines of care that had come into Sarah's face since last he looked upon it. "I had an object in so working. I did not know that I was going to have a legacy bequeathed to me. This remarkable event occurred about a month ago. I am now a comparatively rich man, and, as a not unnatural consequence, I want a wife, either to spend or to hoard my money. Miss Anstruther, you are an old friend, and I have a great opinion of your judgment. So has my mother, as you

well know, and we both want to get, if possible, your approval of the lady I have chosen."

"Mrs. Lumley Rogers?"

The name was spoken impulsively, and because it came naturally to Sarah's lips; also, because she was painfully conscious of a sudden whiteness overspreading her face, and anything was better than giving him an opportunity of observing this.

"I thought you would have no difficulty in guessing the object of my choice," he replied, with quite a sunbeam of a smile; "and now, may I ask your candid opinion of our fitness for each other?"

"Indeed, I can be no judge," said poor Sarah, thinking at that moment that she would far rather have the new rector opposite to her than Robert Alleyne. "*Your* opinion in the matter is surely the chief thing. You always appeared to admire and like Mrs. Rogers greatly."

"Exactly;" he continued, with a smile a shade graver this time. "I did admire and

like that very attractive lady greatly. I thought she was too good, too sincere, too genuine for the foolish world whose claims she weakly admitted. I wanted my mother to know her. I have always had an immense idea of my mother's power of influencing her own sex, and I hoped much for the widow, from their introduction to each other. When I found that my openly expressed admiration for this charming lady had excited, in my mother's mind, a suspicion that I was seriously attached to her, a little spirit of mischief, for the first time in my life, as I believe, took possession of me, and I suffered the mistake to remain uncontradicted. It was my intention then to clear the matter up much sooner than circumstances have enabled me to do. *Now*, my dear mother knows, that my heart and judgment had already made their election before I sought to gain her friendship for Mrs. Lumley Rogers. Miss Anstruther—Sarah—I think, your second guess will come a little nearer to the truth. You are

too candid, too generous to keep me in suspense. Tell me, then, whether *your* heart and *your* judgment can truly sympathize with mine; whether you approve for me the dear wife I have chosen?"

Sarah trembled visibly, and her face went even paler than before as she said, in a scarcely audible voice:—

"Are you quite sure that, all unworthy as she is, you really love her?"

Then he went over and took her to his heart, and neither of them had any farther doubts concerning the reality or tenderness of the other's affection.

* * * *

Fifteen years have passed swiftly away since the bleak winter's night when Sarah Anstruther—with a joy too deep to be quite revealed, even to *him*—consented to become the wife of Robert Alleyne. They have lived together during these years, as happily and blessedly as it is ever permitted the children

of earth to live. The mother so very dear to them both has been graciously spared to them, and little voices and little feet have echoed merrily in their peaceful home, and given them, day by day, new causes of thankfulness to their Father in Heaven.

To Sarah, there has been indeed, hitherto, just one wish unfulfilled, one yearning unsatisfied, but she has waited patiently and uncomplainingly, and at length she is to have her reward.

It is a bright, glowing summer's evening, and Pengarthen Hall, where a tolerably large party have assembled, has once more unclosed its massive doors, thrown wide its flower-decked windows, put on the gayest of all holiday dresses to welcome back its long absent master and mistress from "foreign parts." So much has been done of late years, in accordance with Mr. Leonard's written instructions to a new and more benevolent steward, for the benefit and comfort of the tenantry, that it is a real welcome he is to

have from them to-night. Neither will Mr. Leonard's wife be uncheered or forgotten; for out of her own money, inherited from her mother, Lizzie has sent home a sufficient sum to build the almshouses so long ago projected, and a small, neat chapel in place of the whitewashed loft in which her heart had been touched and subdued at the time of her first sore trouble.

Amongst the friends and kindred assembled to greet the wanderers, is the ci-devant Miss Kitty Anstruther, now transformed into the blooming, active, useful wife of that very rector she ran away to bed to escape from, fifteen years ago. Lizzie will certainly not recognise in this charming and sedate young matron, the vain and giddy little girl who gave her so much anxiety in days gone by. Kitty, however, is still sufficiently fond of society, and very warmly interested in the concerns of all around her. She has been talking to Sarah and Mrs. Leonard of old friends and acquaintances, learning that poor

Fanny Erskine is quite as unhappy in her marriage as Alice feared she would be, that the Dowager Mrs. Erskine quarrels both with her son and daughter-in-law from morning till night, and that Edward has lost his good looks, and is now fast drinking himself to death.

And now, in reply to other inquiries on a different subject, the little lady is told that Mrs. Lumley Rogers still remains a zealous member of the sisterhood (for the reformation of female outcasts) which she joined soon after Sarah Anstruther's marriage; that, according to her own statement, she is far happier than she ever was in the world, and has never had the shadow of a wish to return to it again.

"The world has certainly been the loser in this case," said Robert Alleyne, who had joined the gossipping ladies a few minutes before. "Mrs. Rogers had doubtless many faults, but she was of all women I ever knew the one to whom the term 'fascinating' might be most justly applied."

"Well!" exclaimed Kitty, with just a little smile of conscious loveliness, "I don't think I should like *my* husband to speak in that way of any woman, either in the world or out of the world, except myself; but I suppose Sarah is too meek and good to know what jealousy means."

"Too wise at all events to feel it after fifteen years' trial of her husband," said Robert, with a fond, smiling glance at the happy-looking wife by his side. "I won't declare, though, that she *never* thought I appreciated the fair widow more than I had a right to do."

"Hush! hush! Robert," laughed Sarah, as she put up her hand, and pressed it against his tell-tale lips. "We are old married people now, and I won't have any recurrence in public to the weaknesses of our youth. You did, however, admire Mrs. Rogers immensely —yes, I *will* have the last word. Ask our dear mother here if I had not every reason to be jealous, though you could not have guessed that I was?"

They were interrupted by the entrance of the newly-appointed housekeeper, a staid old gentlewoman who looked exactly fitted for the situation she held. Her errand was a brief one, and had only reference to some of the arrangements in connection with the eagerly looked for arrival of the master and mistress of the Hall; but Kitty had been reminded by this person's appearance of another question she had yet to ask.

"Leah Ash, that handsome, young woman who was housekeeper here when I was a child. Has anything been heard of her? has she ever come home?"

"No—nothing has ever been heard of her since the night she went away. Her parents have long ago believed her dead. They removed from this neighbourhood about a year ago."

"How very extraordinary and mysterious that flight of Leah's was," continued Kitty, threatening to get into a thoughtful mood; "but, indeed, I have always believed that you

two" (indicating Mrs. Leonard and Sarah) "know more about it than you have ever chosen to tell me."

"Kitty, there is certainly a sound of cheering in the distance!" exclaimed Robert abruptly, as his wife and mother exchanged graver looks than either of their countenances had yet worn this evening. "If my legs were as young and fleet as yours, I would take two or three of our little ones (who are as wild and restless as they can be), and run to the end of the avenue. There, I told you so—the carriage must be in sight. Don't you hear the bells?"

Yes—they all heard the loud joyous peal that rang out at that moment, but nobody was calm enough to think of bells, or of the people's even noisier welcome, or of anything but the two occupants of the carriage that was now seen coming at a tolerably rapid pace up the long avenue.

They all, with one accord, went out of the house and stood in a group upon the hall

steps to receive the travellers. Kitty, as the youngest and most impulsive of *that* generation (Sarah's five darlings had yet to be introduced to their aunt), sprang to the carriage door the instant the horses were drawn up, and was locked in her sister's arms before any of the others had time to get one glance at Lizzie's face.

"Of course it must be my Kitty," the latter had said, in trembling accents, as the beautiful young lady flew to her embrace, "but indeed, indeed, I should not have known you had we met elsewhere."

"Nor I you, Lizzie."

These words were spoken slowly, and in a tone so grave that even Kitty's husband would scarcely have recognised her voice. Those who had known Lizzie fifteen years ago would have understood it however, for the moment Lizzie stood amongst them they all seemed to read at once the unwritten history of those fifteen years.

"There was a nameless change come o'er that face,
A falling off of beauty and of grace."

And though, after the first half hour spent with the beloved ones, so long vainly yearned for, a little of the old expression came back, those to whom she was so unspeakably dear could not in any way recover the shock of her first appearance.

And yet, changed as Lizzie was, with the mental weariness and hopelessness of nearly fifteen years indelibly imprinted on her still winning features, the alteration in Frederick Leonard, the husband to whom she had sacrificed herself, was greater and more complete.

At thirty-eight he was an old man without a vestige of youth remaining. Lizzie watched him and waited upon him as if this had become her sole care and duty in life. To be with her long lost friends, to talk to them, to listen to them, to look at them, seemed strange and almost bewildering pleasures to her—but the one great thought of her life, its business, its object, its engrossing reality was evidently her husband. And from him, too, as it was soon manifest, she had her great reward.

The very tone of his voice, as from time to time he called her by the old pet name, the wistful, humbled expression of his eye as, whenever she came near him, he stroked one of her hands, or laid his own tenderly upon her head—all proclaimed that the moral change in Frederick Leonard was, at least, equal to that physical one which had so startled the friends assembled to welcome him.

His "Lisette," notwithstanding her lost youth and diminished beauty, was far more to him now than she had ever been in the brightest days of her girlish loveliness.

For after long years Lizzie had succeeded in winning this bad and selfish husband from himself, from his evil passions, from the power of sin and Satan—in winning him to truth and purity, and the ardent love of things that were good.

It was a great victory for so weak a woman to gain, and to her mind, at least, it mattered little how much of youth, how much of

beauty, how much even of the heart's lightness and joyousness she had spent in the task now completed.

The future was before her, wherein to look out for happiness again. The quiet home life filled up with those pleasant duties concerning which she had once had such glowing visions, the frequent society of the dear, dear friends she should leave no more, the constant witnessing of her husband's contentment (to say nothing of his grateful devotion to herself) would be happiness enough, and more than enough, Lizzie said and felt, to atone to her for all she had gone through.

"But who will ever know what that 'all' has been, darling?" whispered Sarah, as the sisters for a little while that night talked alone together. "My only wonder is that you ever have lived through it, or rather, I should say, my second wonder, for the first relates to the miracle wrought on Frederick. Lizzie, I *may* ask you how you managed this?"

"I don't think I managed it at all, Sarah.

I felt so deeply my own utter inability to do anything in the matter, that I just went to God day by day, and asked him for wisdom, and strength, and patience, as I should need these gifts. I needed them every moment for a long, long while; but as it was His work, and not mine, you must not be surprised that it went on and on, and was finished triumphantly at last. Teach your children, Sarah, never to despair of accomplishing anything, however hard, in which they can ask God to help them. Is not my success worth all you fancy it has cost me, though it has only come to me AFTER LONG YEARS?"

THE END.

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